

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



113 469

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



AN ALCOHOLIC

to His Sons

AS TOLD TO Henry Beetle Hough



SIMON AND SCHUSTER • NEW YORK

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
INCLUDING THE RIGHT OF REPRODUCTION
IN WHOLE OR IN PART IN ANY FORM
COPYRIGHT, 1954, BY HENRY BEETLE HOUGH
PUBLISHED BY SIMON AND SCHUSTER, INC.
ROCKEFELLER CENTER, 630 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK 20, N. Y.

FIRST PRINTING

Dewey Decimal Classification Number: 131.3

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY KINGSPORT PRESS, INC., KINGSPORT, TENN.

•

**TO THE MARTHA'S VINEYARD GROUP OF
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS**

•

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	ix
1. <i>The WHY of These Pages</i>	1
2. <i>Introduction to Alcoholism</i>	6
3. <i>An Unseen Stranger in My House</i>	42
4. <i>It Wasn't So Good for Business</i>	73
5. <i>"I Like It Too Well to Fool with It"</i>	104
6. <i>Twenty-five Years with Alcohol</i>	120
7. <i>The Turn of the Road</i>	141
8. <i>All the Lost Companions</i>	185
9. <i>What to Do About It</i>	207
10. <i>A Final Word to My Sons</i>	242

Foreword

THIS is the book a friend asked me to write.

The central figure remains anonymous, for the purpose has been to present a statement of truth about alcohol and alcoholism in terms of experience, not a detailed story of a man's life. The reader may ask, "Is it genuine?" Yes, there is nothing here that is not genuine; but I have not hesitated to transpose, paraphrase, and substitute for the sake of a necessary and real anonymity, and for the sake of the aim that runs through every page.

Externals have not mattered. The identity of any of those whose experiences are told here does not matter. The only important thing has been to reach as much as possible of the fact of alcoholic experience and to make it serve those, especially the young, who can profit by sound knowledge and information.

The sort of experience likely to be of value is that concerning the patterns of alcoholism in contemporary life, danger signs, attitudes wise or foolish, false lures, the meeting of various challenges. The material of the book has been selected accordingly, and there is no exploring of familiar alcoholic horrors. This is as my friend wanted it to be.

Throughout the project I have had the aid and friendship of the Martha's Vineyard group of Alcoholics Anonymous, to whom the book is dedicated; I wish it were possible to make a more personal acknowledgement to that gallant band.

HENRY BEETLE HOUGH

Edgartown, Massachusetts

1. The WHY of These Pages

MY SONS know that I am a drunkard, or at least that I was one, for the knowledge could hardly be kept from them despite a long period of pretense on both sides; and when a man occupies twenty-five years more or less drinking himself into all that is implied by the word "drunkard," he cannot expect the tense to be changed in any short interval. I know that I am no longer what I was, but it will take more and still more time to prove to my family and friends that for me drinking is in the past.

Meantime I should like to speak of my experience, and of this whole subject, to my sons, one of whom is entering college and one of whom is about to be graduated—not as a preachment, or as a confession for restoring my own self-respect, but as a venture in straightforward intelligence so that they may be guided, if only they will be, in their own choices and conduct. It is embarrassing, perhaps it is not even possible, to enter into a conversation of this sort with one's own sons, considering the intimacy of the relationship, the crossing of normal lines of respect, and the natural reticences which within a family are not easily overcome.

But it is possible to speak through the relative objectivity of the printed page, and in this way too I may reach the sons of other men for whom what I have to say is relevant and likely to be useful. Obviously a man in my position who has come to see certain things clearly and who has acquired insights and awareness painfully and at great cost would like his education, if I may call it that, to serve a purpose. Otherwise the thought of the waste is appalling.

My memories go back to the years before 1914 when the attitudes of men and women were far simpler than they are now. I remember walking downtown with my own father and stopping to chat with a saloon-keeper in front of his place of business. This saloon-keeper was a big man, as many of his calling were, and his bulk and knowing manner seemed to give conviction to what he said.

He told my father that times were changing and saloons were coming upon leaner days. "Young men don't like to be seen hanging around barrooms nowadays," he said. And as we stood and listened to him talk, I caught the vision of a better era in which the world was moving steadily nearer to principle and morality.

The feeling was a general one and applied to all sorts of human concerns. From what the high school history teacher said, and from what we read in the magazines, it seemed certain there would be no more wars—except, perhaps, a few perverse and dwindling affairs in the Balkans. Poverty and vice, due to the modern sense of responsibility in society at large, were on their way out. All sorts of relationships were becoming clear; nothing was clouded any longer.

Men thought quite generally in these terms, and they had, without self-consciousness, the old Puritan sense of obligation toward their fellow-men. Under such circumstances—anything seemed not only possible but easy of accomplishment in those days—it was only natural that the end of "the evils of the liquor traffic" and the rule of "demon rum" should be foreseen. Even among men and women who drank moderately and enjoyed beer or wine or brandy these categorical phrases were widely accepted, and though they hated to see liquor go, so far as they personally were concerned, they were willing to acquiesce in order that society as a whole might be purged and set over toward the good life.

Of course what I say here is an over-simplification. There were many different attitudes, as there are now, but I believe I have fairly characterized the period or, at least, pointed to its most influential symbols.

It is more difficult to describe without distortion and even more

over-simplification what happened next—but obviously what my father's saloon-keeper friend expected, never came. For one thing, the zealots whose eyes foresaw the golden age pressed too hard and too fast. For another, the experiences of World War I, whether they brought as much cynicism and moral let-down as it was the fashion to say, certainly favored and accelerated a fresh tide of realism.

Men who were willing to give up liquor for the general good soon found that others were not; and if others were not giving it up, they decided not to give it up, either. As in the matter of war, poverty, and so many of the problems of the centuries, so too with alcohol: the golden age lay still in the future, and many said, "There is no golden age. There is only the hope and truth in man himself."

This meant, of course, that the old concepts were wrong. The world and the life and experience of man could not be divided sharply into right and wrong, there were few rules that would apply naturally and equally to all, either all men or all situations. Reform was not an apple to be picked. Mankind needed not only a sense of obligation, but a great and hard-fought wisdom, and continuing effort and enlightenment in fulfilling it. We cannot move out into a single bright sunlight and dwell there forever, but instead we must face the twilights of every returning dawn and evening as a normal condition requiring effort and discernment and decision.

This new realism soon taught most of us that such phrases as "the evils of the liquor traffic" and "demon rum" were empty and misleading, for alcoholic liquor in itself possessed no moral quality and could be dismissed with no easy moral judgment. In plain fact, as most men came to see it, alcoholic liquors were among the good things of life, and evil followed only when they were wrongly used. In the past, we had been asked in the name of social responsibility to exaggerate and accept all that was harmful that sprang from liquor, and to ignore all that was or could be good.

A school friend of mine long ago won a prize for an essay on the subject, "What is the harm in a glass of beer?" He took the prize

in music a man who is tone deaf would be foolish to persist; many of us have no glimmer of the sense of form or color that might be developed to make us artists; some among us are without the knack of balance necessary to ride a bicycle. The science of mathematics is even more universal than alcoholic liquor, but there are legions of mankind whose mental processes are unequal to the grasp of its functions and principles. Mathematicians must have a certain native endowment.

Many human beings cannot eat strawberries, many cannot sleep on feather pillows, many have lifetime susceptibility to seasickness. Some are born with allergies, some develop allergies through the overuse of substances which ultimately produce the symptoms they were intended to cure.

This concept I will develop later. Obviously, no man is born into the world a finished product. He is born with a multitude of potentialities but with some limitations too, and what he becomes will depend upon inheritance and many other attributes and influences. As he matures, he must depend more and more upon himself. But this does not mean a withdrawn and solitary life away from the help of friends or even of society.

I, who have been a drunkard, was not born to be one. I made myself one. I now address my sons on the subject of my experience without shame, since this is not essentially a moral matter—even though drinking has profound moral implications; without self-pity, since here is a subject of all subjects demanding maturity; and without resentment against those who have been able to use liquor with enjoyment and, I am sure, with benefit in the preoccupations of life.

“Without resentment”—I would emphasize these words, for today I am a non-drinker, and from the outset there must be no rationalization or lack of candor. Anger and envy and bitterness must be among the first, as they are among the worst, enemies to be hunted out of the coverts and exorcised if the non-drinker is to walk happily and erect in the company of his neighbors.

2. *Introduction to Alcoholism*

I HAVE used the word "drunkard" because it is important to speak plainly and to have no fear of the bluntest terms so long as they are accurate—when one who has had misadventures with liquor is particular about the terms in which he or his experiences are described, he is obviously resorting to evasion and excuse. Evasion and excuse run through the history of drinking like a musical accompaniment.

But "drunkard" is an old-fashioned word with too much bluntness and no sharp edge. It carries a haze of emotional overtones and many misconceptions as well. You are revolted by a drunkard, you laugh at him, you pity him, you feel superior to him—all this at different times, and more—but still you do not know what he is.

The word "alcoholic" is preferable because it is defining. It is as precise and accurately descriptive as "tubercular" for one having tuberculosis, or "epileptic" for one having epilepsy. Someone may suggest that by inviting the connotations of illness I escape a burden of opprobrium. The answer is that the habitual or excessive drinker would a thousand times prefer to be called by any of the opprobrious epithets of the language—souse, soak, drunkard, barfly, and so on and on—than an alcoholic, for its cold, clinical truth binds him without mercy to the fact of what he is and the inescapable choice he must make. The other terms may be by-passed, this one never.

With this explanation, I begin to look back to trace the steps by

which I became an alcoholic. And this is the way I shall write, having my sons in mind but not addressing them by name. I mean to be as objective as possible. Perhaps it is better that, rather than facing them, I should ask them to look over my shoulder. I seem to be aware that they are peering over my shoulder now as I put down some things already familiar to them.

What was the first step? It is natural to want to know that. My own answer to the question will be reserved until later, and before then my readers will have had an opportunity to reach their own conclusions. I shall put down all the facts.

Was it, after all, my first taste of alcohol, as the moralists would have said—and did say so often in the old days? This is an easy answer, avoiding complications and also avoiding, I am afraid, honest inquiry. Would it not be odd if a first taste of alcohol in youth started me on a course of deterioration and despair yet did nothing of the sort for so many others?

Could I have started life so differently constituted from my generation as a whole? Could I have been one of a predestined minority, vulnerable by nature? I will answer that this surely may have been the case, for in mankind is the incalculable gift of difference which is one of the things that sets him apart; but even assuming this subtle and mysterious preparation for the harm and not the good of alcohol, reaching back perhaps into heredity, we must not wholly deny the freedom of the individual as a person and an adaptable organism. That first drink was obviously an early circumstance of a chain that was to follow, but it was not possibly a cause that led to an effect.

It is the cause I am after here—the first step that began to foresee and enter into a commitment, that began to shape a complete and definitive outcome.

We must assume that men begin their tryst with alcoholism in different ways, because to believe anything else would be to deny what we know of the diverse backgrounds, talents, needs and personalities of men, and of the variety of human behavior. If a taste of alcohol were the significant beginning, it would be the first step for all. And we know that the reason for taking the first drink is not

the same always, nor is it the same as that for taking the tenth or perhaps the hundredth.

As reasons, motives, desires, responses, change and harden, somewhere the pattern comes in. Somewhere there is the step that may be taken as a cause, that partakes no matter how subtly or unobtrusively of the nature of a commitment—the beginning that cannot be quite complete without the end. Moralists would have looked no further than the matter of repetition. The first drink repeated often enough—then follows the copybook penalty, drunkenness and the social judgment of alcohol. But repetition for the majority of our living generations seems to result in a reward of greater or less degree, not in penalty.

I have raised the question. Let it be held in mind as the reader of a story holds and considers the unresolved questions of the plot. Whatever we can discover as to the cause will help in formulating a guide, a plan of prevention, an understanding for those who are of the generation of my sons.

Age of Innocence

I was born into an age of innocence. That is true in some degree of us all, I think. Childhood and youth, even in a sick time of the world, make their own warm, glimmering light and fragrance of dewy mornings. A tenement back yard, treeless and strewn with trash, may be an Arcady, though a fleeting one; and no matter how little of a child's dreams may be realized, he does not doubt that the fulfillment exists, just beyond his grasping.

But for me the time was recognized and proclaimed, for it was that happy time of which I have spoken, before World War I, when wisdom, plenty, and contentment seemed no more remote than next spring or at least the next spring after.

We had our own house, painted yellow, set apart from other houses on the street by ample yards in which pendulous mulberries, sweetbriar roses, and clematis or honeysuckle grew. The city was a large one for the time—it was approaching a hundred thousand inhabitants, and the spirit everywhere was of enterprise and progress. Shrewd capitalists with the surnames of our old families,

names that seemed synonymous both with the city and with progress, were building new mills, and the city itself was building schools and setting out trees in the parks.

The streets were lighted by gas, each squat pole tended at dusk and I suppose after dawn by a boy on a bicycle. But on some of the most important corners, arc lights hissed and sputtered aloft on their higher perches and seemed to turn night into day. Things that a child would remember were the ice wagon rumbling past, with chips to be sucked if one dared mount the rear step and reach for them; getting chased by a policeman on Halloween, expeditions to skating ponds out beyond the cemetery; the cycles of popularity for stilts, kites, hoops, and tops.

I remember also the great new mills of brick and some of the saloons that stood close by. Sometimes when I walked past just before the quitting whistle was to blow, I could see through the windows that the bar was completely covered with freshly-drawn beers awaiting the rush of the weary and thirsty.

My father owned a planing mill, and sometimes as a child I was allowed to go through the empty mill on a Sunday, scuffing along in the sawdust, collecting blocks of sweet-smelling wood in my pockets, and relishing the nearness of piles of new lumber. Before my brothers and I were grown, however, my father sold the mill to the railroad for an extremely satisfactory price, since the site was needed for an extension of the freight yard. After that he lived on his investments and the income from various consulting jobs, for he was considered an expert on all types of construction.

Next door to us on one side lived a merchant tailor, and on the other a retired police captain who had become housekeeper of a precinct station where checkers were more prevalent than any signs of crime. So the list of neighbors went—a cotton mill executive, a grocer, a teller in a bank, a young lawyer. With the children of these families I played in vacant lots or in the streets which, in those days, were not considered dangerous.

It was a tranquil neighborhood and a tranquil kind of life. Looking back on those years, I can recall many disagreements and displays of irritability on the part of my father or my mother, but

nothing that marred our home life as a whole. Even some of the irritations—for instance, my father's refusal to part with a peculiar piece of furniture in the front hall where hats, coats, rubbers, umbrellas, and canes were accommodated—seemed to reinforce our lucky solidarity. We made jokes of them, when we dared.

I was the middle of three brothers. Neither of the others, it is important to add at once, became an alcoholic. We got on well together. I cannot recall that my father was harsh in his authority or that my brothers and I resented the discipline he imposed. I cannot recall, either, that my mother was unduly possessive. Such factors in childhood are sometimes assigned as contributory causes to later alcoholism, for a child grown into an adult (but retaining the impress of infantile years) may continue to flee or combat or court family phantoms from a past he carries too long and too much with him. But fatherly harshness and motherly possessiveness are only two of the strong undercurrents that have an unrecognized influence in later life.

Perhaps it is safest for me to say that I cannot fit myself into any of the cases I have seen cited as instances in which an obsessed later life is traced to childhood. Relatively few individuals, I dare say, do lend themselves so neatly to a single clear-cut explanation; if it were otherwise, the task of the psychiatrist would be enormously simplified. All of us, I imagine, deep in our unawareness, are occupied at times and in some degree with themes from childhood, though they may remain in mysterious balance or perhaps in mysterious confusion.

In any case, I had no reason later on to seek revenge or compensation or escape because of my life as a child, though some impulse to flee back into childhood may have stirred without my knowledge. I see myself as one of the majority for whom life was on the whole natural, pleasant, and so much a matter of course that I should be troubled to isolate any important disturbing influences.

My father did not drink.

I think he was proud that he did not, yet he was magnanimous toward others who did drink, and there was liquor in the house for special occasions, though little display was made of it. Whisky,

brandy, and occasionally liqueurs were kept in a carved corner cabinet with a glass door, and I knew the names of these fluids before I was aware of what they were or the significance attached to them. I do not remember that they particularly challenged my curiosity.

I say my father did not drink, but this was not an absolute. One time after he had taken my older brother and me to a baseball game and we were walking home from the athletic field because the streetcars were so crowded, he made us wait while he went into a saloon to go to the toilet. When he came out we somehow knew he had paid for the convenience by having a glass of beer.

All this I put down to show that I was like so many others. I was a product of a way of life, of a period, of a generation of our America. But I was also a separated and distinct individual.

Two Drunks

The law that regulated the sale of liquor provided for local option, which meant that in each municipal election campaign—and we elected a mayor and aldermen every year—the question of license or no license was an important issue. There were always ministers who preached from their pulpits against liquor and campaigned for no license, and on the other side the liquor dealers and brewers (we had no distillers in our city) naturally realized their important stake in the outcome. Church members contributed to the no license cause in the same way as they did to missions, but saloon keepers gave to political funds as a matter of business. Sometimes they were told how much to give, and no doubt set down the amount as part of the cost of a license.

Often it was common knowledge that if a certain candidate were elected mayor, a particular group of liquor dealers would receive the limited number of licenses allowed by law, and others would be frozen out. This might mean that both candidates enjoyed liquor backing, although both might declare for temperance and reform.

In one hard-fought municipal campaign, a noted lawyer was imported to address a rally held by the liquor forces which, in that year, were trying to make a case for themselves before the public.

This lawyer was a famous speaker and also an exponent of rationalism and an astringent individualism. He had no use for buncombe. He argued for the sale of liquor on the ground of freedom and right—there should be no more legal restriction surrounding its use than surrounding the use of air or water—and when it came to the question of a man sinking into a drunkard's grave—here the lawyer's voice rose to a commanding resonance—"I say, let him fill it."

Alcohol, as he saw it, was a willing indulgence, a pleasure, that any man could indulge in if he wished or, equally, could abstain from. The matter was entirely up to him as a free, responsible, rational human animal.

"I say, let him fill it."

This was a stunning point of view, for although there were many who felt that drunkards were a worthless lot to be kept out of the way, jailed frequently, and lectured on their shortcomings, no one in our city had yet thought of abandoning them to their own chosen ruin.

Of course the ministers replied in their churches. One of them said that such a sentiment was unworthy of any of God's children who professed Christian principles—as of course it was. I do not believe the orator regarded himself as a Christian in the churchman's sense; he was the complete rationalist. But I think he was also a big boy talking to shock and astonish the multitudes. He enjoyed his moment and was gone from our city.

The vote that year was once more in favor of license, but almost certainly because of the money spent by the liquor crowd and the liking so many respectable people had for their beer, not because the visiting lawyer had made headway with his advocacy of the devil take the hindmost.

I had heard of drunkards in two ways: during the election campaigns when so many speeches were made on both sides, and in funny stories in which a drunken man was always depicted as saying or doing something comic. One Sunday while I was still a small boy, I saw a drunken man with my own eyes for the first time.

My parents had gone away for a weekend, taking my older brother with them. My younger brother and myself were left with

the merchant tailor and his wife who lived next door, and because that Sunday was a fair, sunny day our temporary guardians took us for a walk in the nearest park. I think we went to see the few wild animals—deer behind a wire fence and a lonely bear in a Victorian sort of den—but I remember nothing of the animals. I remember only the man who was drunk.

He would have been a young swell, for he wore a light spring suit, straw hat, and shoes I have never forgotten because they were fancy and pointed; yet despite his costume and a manner that went with rather fresh good looks, he made an absurd figure because he was drunk. He weaved from side to side as he walked, his head seemed loosely hinged. Aware of the heavy weather he was making, he had adopted an expression of would-be dignity, and the leer he turned to the world at large was obviously meant as a gracious smile.

"Oh, Bert!" exclaimed the tailor's wife. "You know how afraid I am of anyone in that condition!"

"There, there, Lucy," said Bert, but I think now that he was half afraid himself. He had no idea what he would do if the drunk elected to make a scene. He was not a man of the world.

The object of all this apprehension continued to leer and, when we were almost ready to pass by, raised his hat and said something that sounded like "Buttons-haw."

To my horror, my brother looked at the drunk and said, "What?"

"Donald!" exclaimed the tailor's wife in a tone of rebuke.

"I didn't understand what he said," Donald protested.

The drunk seemed to think all this was immensely funny. He crooked a finger at my brother, wiggled it a few times, and began to laugh uproariously. This was more than his equilibrium could stand. He fell down and his straw hat rolled off in a circle like a cartwheel.

But now we were safely past. The tailor's wife relaxed, and I think the tailor felt he had comported himself as a hero by marching us so directly and properly. This drunk had not been funny. We had all found him fearsome except, perhaps, my brother Donald.

polo game at an indoor rink, the scene of most of the city's winter sporting events. Polo on roller skates was popular then, and our professional team was leading the league that embraced many New England cities. My friend and I were soon watching, as well as the game, the gestures of an old man in a baggy and much-stained gray coat. He may not have been so old in years, but he seemed the very flotsam of weary time.

His goat's hair was fluffy and untidy, his face red and shining-damp. Every now and then he drank from a bottle, replaced the cork, put the bottle back in his pocket, and wiped his lips with an immense and grimy handkerchief that had once been red. At intervals he rose precariously to his feet and yelled in a cracked, hoarse voice that sounded funny, "Remember the Maine!" The oftener he said this, the funnier it was.

One of the players on the opposing team was a Spaniard and, accordingly, the occasion of the drunken man's wit. Whether the Spaniard made a goal, missed a goal, or whatever he did with his lightning stick and the apple-like red ball, the yell was the same—"Remember the Maine!"

This was my second drunk, and he was amusing because everyone regarded him so. He was the pet of the crowd. As soon as he wavered to his feet, you knew what he was going to say, and the crowd began to roar.

My friend and I enjoyed the game more because of the drunken man. We laughed a lot and knew that we had an experience to talk about. We felt a gratifying sense of sophistication that the game without the drunk would not have given us.

It did not occur to me then or until long after to speculate on what manner of men these two first drunks who impinged upon my life were or might have been. They were, if not sinners, outsiders. They were men you didn't know, had nothing to do with. You associated them with the lower classes.

Three Firsts

I grew older and went away to prep school to begin to fulfill the ambitions my parents had for me. My older brother had

gone directly into college after completing four years of high school in three, but I was not so diligent or so well adapted to study. My education and that of my brothers had been planned for since we were children. We were lucky. My father could afford the cost, though he was not wealthy. Sometimes boys were sent away to school even though their fathers could not afford it, with hardship and sacrifice to follow.

In a single room next to the double one that I was sharing roomed Joe Thacker, a shy boy with a brilliant mind. We were about of an age, not yet seventeen, I think. I had never heard of William Blake until I saw Joe reading him. Joe was often surprising; he would neglect things he was supposed to study, applying himself to interests of his own, yet he never had any difficulty with classes. Almost everything came easily to him, but sometimes it seemed that he was more interested in books than in people. He was never happy in a crowd.

Sometimes I would go into Joe's room and talk with him, and on one of these occasions I found him glassy-eyed and strange of behavior. He couldn't talk clearly. There was an empty bottle on the bed, and I picked it up and looked at the label—Ed. Bienville's Eau de Lilac—a hair tonic.

"You been drinking this stuff?" I asked.

Joe grinned. "Sure," he said.

"Good grief, why?"

"Oh," he said, slurring his words, "there's no way to get out of here and bring in any liquor." He was perfectly happy. He seemed to peer at me from a great distance and perhaps from a great height on which, in some queer sense, he was perched by himself.

Joe not only drank hair tonic, he also drank vanilla extract. Sometimes he was sick but this didn't stop his drinking.

Once when I spoke to him about it, he said, "You go into a different world. You feel wonderful."

All of us knew about Joe's fondness for Ed. Bienville's fancy dressing for the scalp, taken internally. Alone in his room he swigged it and retreated into his different world. But his secret was never divulged to the school authorities and they never found

it out for themselves. At the end of the year Joe moved on, and I can only imagine what became of him. Although I did not realize it then, in Joe Thacker, not yet seventeen years old, I had met my first alcoholic.

I was never tempted to sample hair tonic or vanilla extract, but the next year I was in Boston for some hours with other boys from the school, and we had some of the real thing. The novelty of Boston, if there had ever been much, had worn off. The usual occupations of school boys in a city seemed tame—and in any case school boys on such expeditions never consider themselves as just that; we were inquiring and rather cocky personalities, exuberant, supplied with plenty of energy, and ready for adventure.

"Let's see if we can get a drink," suggested Cranky Harris.

"Who, us?" said one of the others, as if he hadn't gotten the idea before he spoke.

We were near The Pub, a Boston bar of interesting reputation. It was a symbol of hail-fellow-well-met, of men among men, of adult indulgence of a special kind. It meant something a little different and more special than cocktail lounges and such places mean today when men and women drink together. Drinking in public was a masculine prerogative.

"Who do you think?" was the obvious reply to a wholly unnecessary question.

"Come on!" I said. "They can only throw us out."

They didn't throw us out. We stood at the bar looking as manly and adult as possible, and the bartender was as casual as if we conformed to a familiar type of drinker.

I ordered a sidecar. I didn't know what it was but I had heard the name. Cranky Harris ordered a Manhattan and somebody had a whisky sour. There were four of us boys, acting like men, standing at the bar.

The liquor was unfamiliar but not distasteful. We took it in easy stages, ready for the effect we had been prepared to anticipate—a burning that was soon pleasant, an entirely new sensation for the palate. As we drank, we glanced knowingly at one another and talked about sports. When our glasses were empty we paid the bill

and came out, feeling fine. The alcohol had given us a sense of well-being—though perhaps a momentary hint of dizziness. But even more we were set up by the achievement. We had ventured and carried off something important.

That was my first drink.

Perhaps there should have been a sequel, but there wasn't. This experience did not lead to another, not for a great while at any rate, and it made no observable change in any of us. It was simply an isolated, detached episode.

Three years later I was at college and one of the big football games was coming up. I had played football a little in my freshman year but I wasn't big enough or good enough to meet the competition. Relegated to the stands as a spectator, however, I had lost none of my interest—and perhaps had gained some, for it is easier and pleasanter for an onlooker to expend energy than for a player on the field; and a sense of participation is easily shared, especially in congenial company.

There were five of us this time, ready to cheer and whoop for the team. Individually we were as different as our background and training had made us, with ideas and inclinations and capacities of our own, but collectively we were a set of young fanatics given over to the excitement of the time and the tradition we had made our own, that the team must win. As they look at us, I should like my sons to be seeing themselves, at least a little.

One of us, a big fellow named Murphy, said he would have a drink for every score the team made. We didn't want to be left out of any such loyal pledge, especially since it would express the spirit of victory in a proper ratio of high celebration.

As it turned out, the team made touchdowns early and often, rolling up a big score. We counted the points with increasing hilarity and reference to our commitment, for although it had become so obviously foolhardy, it remained nevertheless still sacred.

Presently we were seated at a bar, and all of us at this period were legal drinkers. We were about to do something utterly fantastic and impossible, and we enjoyed the prospect. The drinks! Up with the drinks! In gay companionship we started.

Since my Boston adventure in prep school days, I had been in saloons occasionally, and drinking was no longer part of the strange unknown; but I was by no means an experienced drinker. Nothing prepared me for this adventure, nothing prompted me but the excitement, comradeship, and inexpressible good humor.

Five Martinis stood on the bar in front of five young men. They went down easily. Five more. Again, five. After the third drink I remembered nothing until later, when someone had put me to bed in my room.

This was the first time I was drunk.

This incident, too, like that of the invasion of The Pub in prep school days, was isolated and without sequel. I look back upon it as a fragment without any special application to my later behavior and to what happened in the long run.

For me to have gulped one drink after another, without any thought of taste or enjoyment or the nature of the experience, with no other reason except sham heroics and imitation of some ill-defined masculine legend, was certainly a foolish thing—but this was not the real gravity or significance of the affair. What was important, and what does count heavily in the whole balance of the human relationship with alcohol was that I, and my friends too, showed no respect for liquor. We did not even enlarge our experience; we indulged in a stunt.

If an experienced drinker, ripened in wisdom, could say only a single short sentence of advice to the young men and women growing up around him, that sentence would very likely take the form of three short words: "Respect the stuff."

Both my sons will remember how they were taught the use of a gun, and how the first rule of all was to respect it because it was dangerous, and because it required care and precision. With tools there was the same instruction. The steel of tools is tempered and sharp, exquisite for the craftsman who understands their qualities. Other things the boys were to handle they were taught to respect because these things were fragile or beautiful or costly.

Respect is different from fear. Respect is based upon knowledge and an alert mind. Respect is the beginning of an adult attitude.

There is nothing in the long history of alcohol and its use by human beings that should lead us to undervalue its potency for good or evil. The record is written in plain terms, yet these simple words have been spoken too seldom: "Respect the stuff."

Whether alcohol is to be friend or foe, no matter how one approaches it—with curiosity, desire, fear, or furtively or openly, or in company with the wise or the foolish—this much is basic. It is a principle, an instruction, that no one can ridicule or shrug off.

Murphy at a Party

This same Murphy, the college companion who had proposed the matching of football scores with drinks for some imagined glory of alma mater or sublimity in ourselves, became the central figure if not the hero of another interlude that same year. He was a gay soul with a liking for the debonair. He affected fancy vests.

One of our friends was a boy named Johnson who had a sister who played the violin, and a few of us were invited to his house for what was called a musicale.

I don't remember much about the party except that it was pretty much the familiar gathering of young people at the period, with the music only incidental. But I do remember that Murphy arrived late, by himself, and that he had been drinking. His breath was strong and his manner slightly, but only slightly, befuddled. He wasn't making a point of being tipsy, but you could tell that he was.

He knocked down a number of hats and coats and then began apologizing too profusely.

"Mortified," he said. "I certainly am mortified."

I thought this was funny, and I began calling him "Mortified Murphy."

"Shut up!" one of the other boys whispered to me, "Can't you see he's got a bun on?"

He did not need to remind me twice of the proprieties of the situation. The idea was that Murphy's condition should be concealed or at least passed off as if it did not exist. Nobody was sup-

posed to be drunk or partly drunk at a party where girls were present. The impoliteness was at least as great as that of failing to wear a necktie or eating with a knife, though it was of a different kind. It concerned the question of good breeding.

Things went along all right for a while, but as the evening progressed and the temperature rose and the air became closer, Murphy's condition deteriorated. He had trouble with his words and insisted on repeating them to prove how rational and controlled he was. What happened then was that the rest of us closed in around him and shortly eased him out into the cool evening air; and after an interval of the fresh air treatment, he was started home. The party continued, and I am sure that most of the girls at Johnson's house that night did not know that the debonair Murphy had been drinking.

The reason I mention this incident is that my story must be, in one of its essentials, a history of attitudes, wise and ignorant, helpful and injurious, informed and prejudiced. Going wrong about alcohol and about alcoholics has often been a matter of attitudes, whether of individuals or groups or of a society at a given time. All of us will be helped by scrutinizing as many different codes and precepts of behavior, particularly our own, as may be possible. Some are better, some worse, but where is the balanced answer? If we do not know that, we can at least find the right direction.

As I look back now, I realize that Murphy's friends acted for his own protection most of all—it would have hurt his reputation if he had made a scene or if it were known that he had been drunk at a party. And, about equally, when a man was the worse for liquor, girls were not supposed to know. You covered up such things or put a good face on them when you could.

It has occurred to me also that there was something worth noting in Murphy's own attitude at the time. The liquor in him did not make him feel like patting himself on the back and acting like more of a fellow than he really was; even under the influence, he remained aware of the general point of view.

One may say that such times are not likely to come again, and so far as I can see they are not. But it will do no harm to remember

that this is how things were within the memory of men and women now living, a not remote yesterday, after all—not in the period of Cotton Mather and the roundheads, but in a period of moderns when people lived by sophisticated standards and considered that civilization was pretty far along.

As for the refreshments at that party of college days, I don't remember what they were, but I am willing to bet they were sandwiches, cake, and coffee. There was no thought of liquor, and nobody had a flask. There was no bottle in the car outside, because there wasn't any car outside. Automobiles were familiar but by no means universal, and college boys seldom had the use of them.

War and Bay Rum

I got drunk a number of times. I don't remember how often. I always did it deliberately, just as several of my friends did. We started drinking for the fun of it, and we kept on until we felt better and better, and sometimes we pushed our joyful spirit too far and were ill or too sleepy to care about anything any more. Past the phase of jollity came tears and sadness, and some of us mourned and wept about our forlorn state, or anything at all, and were not clear afterward just why we had been so despondent.

A fellow named Brownshaw always went in for extravagances of showmanship when he had been drinking too much. Once he stood in an empty street in downtown Boston far past midnight and insisted he would remain there indefinitely in order to mortify the flesh, but he fell asleep and was taken home by his friends. Once he began undressing on the street floor of the dormitory and finished at the top. Another time he began writing letters, mostly undecipherable, and throwing them out the window. We were all amused at Brownshaw. He was a funny chap.

I think we assumed that this was part of being young. It belonged to the heritage of adventure and indulgence that the young are always claiming from the tradition of those who were young before them, though of course the tradition must always be revised and improved upon.

The point is that we didn't get drunk except when we wanted to.

We kept most of the important things straight and, though we often deplored our drunkenness, especially when it led to illness and unpleasantness, we thought of it as a sort of blowing-off that couldn't very well be excluded from this period of our lives.

I was at a borderline age when the United States entered World War I and, as it happened, I spent less than a year in uniform. So far as I know, the experience had no relationship to my later alcoholism.

I enlisted in what was then the Naval Reserve Force for what seemed important special duty, and went directly from college, still without a degree, to offices leased by the government in a sprawling old office building on lower Broadway in New York. There was no time for any Navy training, except for some forced-draught reading of the Bluejackets' Manual, and our assignment did not differ much, in externals at least, from routine office work.

Those were the days of the "Grapejuice Navy" under the regime of Josephus Daniels, and one of my clearest impressions is of the arrival of a bunch of regular Navy men who had passed up grapejuice in favor of bay rum, which was the best alcoholic liquid within their reach. I was told that a bay-rum jag was moderately satisfactory if you couldn't get anything better, but this was in part contradicted by a loose-jointed seaman third class who was continually batting his eyelids.

"The stuff makes you nervous," he said. "It has you twitching like a frog."

"Listen to the dope!" remarked one of his comrades. "He was torpedoed in the Atlantic and they wrung salt water and oil out of him for a week, but what makes him nervous is poor old bay rum. He has to keep picking on it."

"It keeps picking on me," said the nervous seaman, flickering his eyelids like a window shade in a breeze. "Cripes! Do you suppose I'm growing hair on my insides?"

I never knew whether bay rum contributed to nervousness or not, but at this same period I encountered the new experience of not being able to get a drink. Combined with this was the related

experience, brought about by the first, of thinking that I wanted a drink badly.

The reason I could not buy liquor was that wartime law prevented the bars from serving men in uniform. In a restaurant or night club, liquor could not be served at any table at which a man in uniform was sitting.

Visiting friends of the family took me to the Ziegfeld Midnight Frolic on the roof of the New Amsterdam Theater where chorus girls tripped along on a glass runway overhead, and an entertainer with bushy eyebrows sang a doleful song about a Scotchman giving his life in the war. My friends wanted drinks, so the waiter put me at a small table, separated from theirs by a matter of inches. This made it legal for them to have liquor, and at the same time emphasized my proscribed state. I did not appreciate the distinction. At the moment I would have preferred the drinks to the uniform.

I suppose I would have wanted a drink in any case, and if the impulse had been satisfied, the episode would have been of no consequence whatever. But the fact that the impulse could not be gratified, and that the barrier was entirely arbitrary and unreasonable, prolonged and intensified my wanting. I resented the unfair discrimination. I was legally but unjustly prevented from sharing the natural and obvious enjoyment of so many other men and women, none of them more competent than myself, some less deserving as it seemed to me.

The wartime rule seemed to me then and seems to me now both silly and muddle-headed. The men in uniform needed of all things to be treated as men, not as escapees from the nursery.

Of course a great many of them found out where to buy liquor clandestinely, or asked civilian friends to buy it for them. I did this a few times, but for most of that year I did without it because getting it was too inconvenient and I had too little time to learn the ropes—which means, of course, that in the long run I did not want liquor as badly as I thought. I did not even experiment with bay rum.

During what was left of the war I saw a good many drunks in

and out of uniform, but they did not seem to touch my own life. They had no special meaning for me. And soon the war ended.

Prohibition

I returned to college for a few months, took my degree, and found what seemed a congenial job with a big advertising agency. The outlook was bright.

I enjoyed meeting people and talking with them. I liked to discuss things in the large, outline plans for important projects, and work up enthusiasm over possibilities that others were not so quick to see. I was a good salesman of ideas, in fact I was a good idea man.

So far as I knew then, I had no suppressed problems, no difficulties that tact, good nature, and the right words would not overcome or offset. Perhaps I should emphasize the "right words" for I could talk anyone into or out of almost anything if I half way believed in the cause.

I began, then, as a social drinker.

So far, you see, I had hardly been a drinker at all in any problem sense, though I will leave any early implications as to alcoholism until later. True, I had been drunk a good many times, but only through choice when the idea seemed good and there was no special harm to follow. I had experimented with most of the various forms in which alcohol is made to court the human spirit—beer, whisky, gin, rum, and a wide variety of cocktails—but mostly for the interest of seeing what they were like, and for the fun of doing what it is the custom of men to do.

Now, for the first time, my drinking was bound to settle into some kind of a pattern. This was because business hours set limits and routines that all of us followed, and drinks would naturally come at the lunch hour, or after work, or on weekends. It was also because prohibition and the spirit of the times began to determine how and when drinking was done.

The most noticeable thing was the general social sanction for drinking that developed within a few years. The dominant social pressures of my childhood and boyhood memories was almost ex-

actively reversed, for there was more prestige to be gained by drinking than not. Whereas the excesses of former years had been held against alcohol, the excesses were now held against prohibition.

Among many groups and in many parts of the country, I am sure that conditions were otherwise, but I speak here of my own experience and observation. And there could have been no other result of all this than that drinking would become a matter of opportunism. If you could get it, you had a drink. You had all the drinks that were in sight, probably, because you could not be sure when the opportunity would come again.

This habit of drinking not what one preferred, and as much as one liked, but whatever happened to be available and as much as possible, did, of course, affect me directly. It must have affected countless other men of my age in more or less the same circumstances.

I remember a New York trip during which I went to the theater with a college friend, Don Coates, and a couple of girls he knew. Don knew where we could get a drink during the intermission.

Did I want a drink? Thinking back after this long interlude, I do not think that I did particularly. I was enjoying the play. I liked being in New York and there were no tensions or responsibilities worrying me. But Don said a drink was to be had, and the natural thing was to have it.

We not only had one round but another, sitting on stools at an unattractive bar in a stuffy back room of what purported to be a newspaper and fruit store.

"This rye was made yesterday," Don Coates said, twisting his mouth with the distaste that a fastidious drinker was bound to exhibit.

The bartender, a droopy man with only a few wisps of hair across an amazingly white scalp, did not change his expression in the least. He heard remarks of that sort all day and most of the night.

"Just off the boat," he said.

"The boat this was off of hasn't been built yet," said Don, and all four of us laughed and felt gay. I remember how odd it seemed

to see the two girls in their bright, delicate evening costumes, perched on wire-legged stools in that smelly and dingy back room.

What we drank was whisky of a kind, but I don't think we knew whether it was good whisky or bad. We had never troubled to cultivate our tastes. We were prepared by the catch-phrases of the times to find any liquor bad or indifferent, and to drink it anyway, because we were free and twenty-one, and could do as we liked, and because the present moment was always what counted.

Though prohibition is long past and a new generation has grown that never knew the contradictions of the period, the practice still persists of taking drinks that one does not want. I can imagine a colloquy between myself as of now and myself as I was then, and it would run somewhat as follows:

"You don't really want the drink?" my present self asks.

"But the idea doesn't bother me. It will be easy to take," replies my past image.

"A second glass of water would be easy to take a good many times, but you wouldn't take it unless you really wanted it. Why is liquor so different?"

"With the drink, you're always hoping for more effect. Another one might make you feel a little better, or prolong the glow."

"That's not really intelligent," my present self observes. "At least, not more than once or twice. You should very soon find out what a second drink does. Or a third drink. If you don't really want it, in the same sense you sometimes want another glass of water or another helping of potatoes, why take it?"

"Because liquor isn't like anything else. You never know. One drink naturally leads to another."

"Because of what it may do to you or for you?"

"Sure."

"Wouldn't the first drink, taken more slowly and with a little more enjoyment, have done more for your sense of well being than two drinks practically gulped? If the effect is what you want, why not be something of an artist with liquor? What's the big percentage in quantity?"

"I want it to happen suddenly," says my former self, and I see that it is perfectly impossible for him to understand my present point of view.

The pace of drinking, the quantity of drinking, isn't a reasoned thing. You find certain usages existing and the chances are that you follow them. The question whether you want another drink or not is irrelevant when the thing to do is to have another. The question whether one drink could serve you better if you took things more easily is also irrelevant. And all this has nothing to do with whether alcohol is good or bad.

If things are still like that, they were even more so in the time of prohibition, with the justification then that you never knew, never really knew, where the next drink or the next binge was coming from.

We went back to the theater that night and saw the rest of the play, and later we went to another speakeasy that Don knew about, and drank more whisky than we would have had at home or under other circumstances. We all felt high, and Don and I and the girls were extremely good friends by the time we took them home.

I slept late the next day, but Don had to get up early to go to work, and he told me afterward a mock-tragic and hilarious tale about his hangover. Hangovers were immensely funny—when you didn't happen to have one.

Speakeasy

Here I will act as historian for my sons, who, I hope, will never feel a need to drink behind closed doors or in secret, and put down a description of a popular New York speakeasy of prohibition days. There must be a great many men and women who never saw the inside of such a place and who feel some curiosity as to what it was like.

Speakeasies were of different sizes and types, appealing to various sorts of patronage, but the Steam Club was as interesting an instance as any. You walked along the sidewalk in the shadow of the old elevated structure on one of lower New York's narrower and

less pretentious streets, and turned in at a passageway between two small shops, so usual that they melted into anonymity. I don't even remember what they were.

About fifteen or twenty feet along the passage, you came to a grilled metal door. Usually it was open, and a man sitting inside looked you over, but not too carefully. You didn't need an introduction and on my visits I found that even a card was not necessary. But as an initiate you had a card with the words STEAM CLUB printed on it, and a place below for your signature, usually never filled in.

Some friend who had discovered the club would show you the way, and generally he would call to a big man in a black seersucker coat, "Pete, can this man have a card?" Pete was the presiding authority, his enormous bulk the best sign of his position, but a spreading good nature running the bulk a close second. Pete would grin and hand over a card, and you were then a member in good standing of the Steam Club and could introduce as many more members as you liked, obtaining cards for them in this same way.

An extremely large room, almost square, with a bar running completely across the rear, accommodated the patrons of the establishment. There must have been twenty or thirty tables arranged as they would have been in any restaurant, served by waiters who looked like any other waiters. The only difference between the Steam Club and a restaurant was that the Steam Club was concealed, that it sold liquor, and that it was illegal.

The location, though unfashionable and darkened by the elevated, was convenient to the downtown business district, to Wall Street, and to all that these implied. The patronage seemed to be about the same as that of the Railroad Club or even of the Bankers' Club, although as to this I am less sure. I can only say that business and professional men were the chief customers, and that the food was good, the prices in line with those of similar legal restaurants.

Of decorations, the Steam Club was bare. Its walls were plain, its tables cheap and unpretentious, its general manner that of a second-rate establishment. I went to the Steam Club at various times when I was in New York, and later I went to other speak-

easies that were intended especially as resorts in the evening, where a suitable decor was in evidence.

But showy furnishings were not necessary to establish the certain fascination of the time and place. The speakeasy would have had glamour in any case, for it was illegal.

Of course the primary attraction that brought so many customers, day after day, to places like the Steam Club was undoubtedly liquor. Men wanted a drink with their meals, a drink afterward. They liked to stand at the bar with friends. But this was not the whole story. Another element was good food, or food that was at least good enough. Another was a fellowship that makes men like to resort together. And another was the illegality that made every patron an initiate, a knowing citizen. I think that even the most mature and worldly enjoyed the privileged superiority to stiff-necked law.

From the standpoint of history, this might be taken only as a curious aside; but since we ourselves are a part of history, it is worth while observing that the romantic conception so usual in speakeasy days existed long before Prohibition and is with us still. A sense of adventure goes with drinking and is heightened by many external factors. It soared during that era, fattening on the opposition of the disapproving, basking in the initiated fellowship of the bottle.

The baffling thing is that the adventure forever remains real—up to a point—but that it also has some of the falseness and delusion of many a fable. Accepting its reality, one may observe that it cannot be experienced or lived successfully on the plane of children running away on a raft, or supposedly wise men going to sea in a bowl. Its terms are more nearly those of an expedition to climb a mountain, by which I mean that they are earnest and grown-up as well as sporting.

The greatest falseness begins when the adventure is courted in a spirit of imitation, when it becomes self-conscious, when it is an essentially childish gesture.

Most people would be able to see the dividing line more easily if it were not for the fact that the adventure of drinking fits in so

neatly with the almost universal, almost always hidden and secret impulses of defiance and escape.

Social Drinking

So I was a social drinker.

Drinks with the right people at lunch or after office hours helped business. They lifted my spirits, at least for a time. I made friends. Drinking fitted into my way of life.

But I was not a heavy drinker or even a constant drinker. I did get drunk sometimes, but I did not call it that; I simply "put on a little edge," or got tight, or was lit—and drinking myself to this stage was entirely a matter of choice. At times when it wouldn't do, I didn't. At other times when restraints were not important, I did, and in the main it was fun.

As the saying goes, I could handle my liquor. As I myself said, I could take it or leave it alone. But I wouldn't have wanted to leave it alone.

This is the way things were when I was married to Alice, a girl I had known for most of my life. I ask my sons to see her coming upon the scene not as their mother but as a person from the outside, as she then was. At first there seemed to be no responsibilities—or none that mattered—and I am in pain now to have to show my sons the special and dreadful responsibilities that I was to put upon her as months and years passed. The partnership into which we entered was the life of numberless young couples—a home in the suburbs (our first suburbia was around Boston; later I worked in New York and we became Jerseyites), the expectation of bringing up a family, the desire to make friends and have a good time, the ambition to get on. You had to get on, for there were always more things you needed to buy and pay for.

The serious matter of getting on and the desire for a good time went along naturally together; the former would have been hard to see through to the end if it had not been for the latter.

Alice and I were brought into a wide companionship of young people who had recently begun or were just beginning married life as we were. They wanted to know us and we wanted to know them.

Our point of view and many of our interests were much the same. All of us were sophisticated because we had grown up in a sophisticated age. We did not boast about this but we were aware that it was so. We represented the triumph of mind over taboo, of modernity over stuffy convention, of reason over mere habit and prejudice.

We had a good deal of self-will, for that was part of being young. Fulfillment was the aim and promise. You went after it hard. It seems to me now that we also had a good deal of energy and experimental recklessness—"try anything once"! "Experimental" was a good word.

What was it all like?

The neighborhood where we had found a house was newly developed, which meant that the concrete sidewalks were fresh and unmarred, the grass plots neat, and young sycamore maples had been planted along the way. Every house had its garage and entrance drive, and on certain mornings the rubbish cans were set out, and on certain others the coal wagons and icemen made their deliveries.

This is not meant to make the arrangement of our life sound respectable and dull, but only to show that it fell easily into a certain order and convenience. It was no duller than the way of living that had preceded it. In the neighborhood, especially on the slopes of a nearby hill, were the older and larger houses, most of them Victorian, that had been the residences of the town before the transformation into a suburb. One drab box of a mansion, shadowed by a large elm in the side yard, was owned by Mrs. Larabie, an elderly woman who carried on the tradition of the local aristocracy, such as it was.

Mrs. Larabie invited Alice and me to tea, and later she held social gatherings for the young people who had moved into the neighborhood. To our surprise, she served highballs in the evening. She made it clear that she did not care about liquor herself, but she believed in personal liberty and in keeping up with the times.

One night, as we were taking our leave, I shook Mrs. Larabie's hand and said to her, "Thank you, I had a better time than I ex-

pected." At least, Alice told me this was what I had said. We quarreled all the way home. She made me write Mrs. Larabie a note of apology in which I explained that what I had meant was, "I had an *even* better time than I expected."

I had gone a little too far with the highballs, I had been lit, unintentionally and at a wrong time, and hadn't known what I was saying.

Two houses from us lived the Kindners, Walter and Helen, and they were among our first friends of suburbia. At first we were rather formal acquaintances, but all four of us were pressed by Mrs. Larabie into attending a parish house recitation of "Enoch Arden" with musical accompaniment, given for the benefit of some local charity. After it was over, Kindner said he needed a drink and he guessed we all did, and he had a bottle at his house that, although not guaranteed to be good stuff, certainly did have plenty of authority.

So we went to the Kindner house and sat in the kitchen and drank whisky out of china cups, and soon it was Walt and Nell, and Pete (my nickname) and Alice. The liquor established our friendship then and there. We laughed at the obsolete sentiment of "Enoch Arden" and about ourselves and a lot of other things. We felt free and easy. We felt fine.

Nobody could have told me that with a few drinks in the Kindner kitchen I was escaping from anything. But that the world of reality was pleasantly mellowed, and that our better natures had been released, seemed obvious and gratifying.

Among our other early friends were the Sulmets, a couple we hadn't liked much to begin with. Frank Sulmet was surly and, although not much older than I, already fairly hard-bitten. His favorite word was "Phooey!" His wife's name was Ida, and he dragged her around as if she were baggage.

One night, through nothing more than circumstance, the Sulmets drove us home from a bridge party. The moon was shining, and we made more of a ride of it than was necessary.

"Before we roll in," Frank Sulmet suggested, "let's wake up the grumps."

He meant the Partridges, members of a brokerage firm who occupied a double house and had won, with good cause as we saw it, the reputation of being disagreeable. They exercised an overly important influence in local affairs and had blocked a scheme of Frank Sulmet's to have a lane put through in back of his property so that he could enter more easily with his car. Frank now proceeded to draw up in front of the Partridge house, and we all yelled until Leander Partridge came to the window.

"Hi, you old so-and-so," Frank Sulmet shouted at him. "We want Lem, we want Lem!"

Lemuel was the other Partridge, and pretty soon he came to a window on his side of the double house. Frank yelled a few epithets at him and drove off. It was all so funny—as we thought then—that we laughed uproariously. So far as the Partridges were concerned, there was no sequel to this episode; I suppose they had not been able to identify us in the darkness. But after this the Sulmets were friends of ours, and even years later Frank could revive the merriment of the occasion by pulling a long face, in imitation of Leander Partridge, and reminding us of the night we woke up the grumps.

A few drinks had accomplished all this, a few drinks that made us feel free and gay.

A few drinks.

As a matter of fact, with Frank Sulmet it had been more than a few. His capacity for liquor was a wonder in the neighborhood.

"Frank can put it away by the quart, even the worst rot-gut," Walt Kindner remarked once when we were puzzling over his odd personality.

He was to continue putting it away in quantity for many years, yet I know now that Frank Sulmet was not an alcoholic. He was the curious exception, a not unfamiliar type yet one much rarer than is supposed. He was a hard drinker, that and no more.

This may be illustrated readily enough. In the good times of the life we led, the weekends soon assumed special importance. We had parties at the weekend, we went places, we stayed up most of the night or all night, we drank as much as we pleased and for as

long as we pleased. But Monday was a day of judgment and there came a Monday when I couldn't drag myself out in the morning and manage an appearance at the office. Alice took it all right. She lectured me a little, but this was the first time and, after all, it might happen to anyone. She telephoned to my boss and reported me laid up with twenty-four hour gripe or something of the kind, so that was all right.

I consoled myself with the thought that Frank Sulmet must be in a worse state than I. Knowing what he had consumed in the way of liquor, how could I believe otherwise? But, much to my surprise, Frank had risen as usual, notwithstanding his hangover—which he described to me in picturesque terms later—and had gone about his business.

There are hard drinkers who can do that sort of thing. They show up, bleary-eyed and with pouches under their eyes, where and when they are supposed to show up. They are known as soaks or drunkards and their work and reputations suffer, but they do show up.

The alcoholic is different. *The alcoholic always misses the boat.*

The fact that there are Frank Sulmets in the world is a sad one for a great many of the rest of us. Because he can do it, we think we can do it too. Because he misses, not the penalty of too much alcohol, but the particular penalties of alcoholism, we imagine we are missing them also. We see ourselves in his image. For a long time we admire the way he handles his liquor, even though we do not see him as an admirable character altogether, and if, later on, we do not have reason to esteem him so highly as an expert drinker, it is then too late.

As far back as those early years, I was puzzled by the difference between Frank Sulmet's way with alcohol and my own. Was I already becoming an alcoholic? Well, there were signs that meant nothing to me then.

Shadow Line in the Night

My sons, following all this so far, might well exclaim, "But nothing has happened yet!"

Certainly nothing had happened. Here was I, sufficiently contented so far as anyone could see and so far as I was aware myself, getting along fairly well in business, making friends, in love with my wife, keeping my drinking within bounds and, when I behaved foolishly, doing so only as the young are prone to behave foolishly, without falling into trouble.

The one specific milestone that stands out was the first missed Monday. What, after all, did such a slip amount to? As I told Alice and myself at the time, it was nothing—nothing that might not happen to anyone. If I had not missed any more Mondays, there might have been no story for me to set down here.

But the point is that events for some time had been leading to that episode. My life was falling into a pattern which I did not recognize, and, given that pattern, nothing was more certain than that I would presently be so much the worse for wear on a Monday morning that I could not start the new week. Part of the same certainty was, no less, that there would be other Mondays of the same kind, soon or late, and that the succession would become commonplace. The argument with Alice would be, not about sleeping off a hangover on Monday, but about how frequently I had to do this.

At first an interval of a few months wasn't so bad, and then an interval of a few weeks between Monday difficulties . . .

I wonder now, therefore, whether it is reasonable to insist that I was not an alcoholic on that first bad Monday and that I did not become an alcoholic, say, until the fifth or the tenth or the twentieth?

The point of this question is to show how difficult and how embarrassing the question of recognition and definition may become. The way to alcoholism is not across a bridge or through a portal marked with warning signs and illuminated with floodlights; it lies across a shadow line that is crossed in heavy darkness, at night, and in obscure cloud and haze.

I know now that my pleasantly controlled social drinking developed into alcoholism as subtly and unnoticeably as some case of diabetes creeps into the life of a victim of this disease.

But certainly there must be signs? Yes, there are signs, but usually they are not of a spectacular sort. They are slight changes of viewpoint and of behavior that the drinker can explain away and usually conceal from those around him. Some of these had already become part of my experience, and it is time to tell about them.

Sneaked Drinks

I don't remember the first time. I cannot even guess when the first time was. But I do recall that when I was mixing silver fizzes or highballs or gimlets in the kitchen, a period came when I would sneak one or two in order to be that much ahead of the crowd, or even ahead of Alice, if we were alone.

It was a simple transition from merely tasting a drink to be sure it would greet the palate well, to tossing off one or two for my own hasty indulgence. If I didn't have a head start, my feeling was that I would be laboring under a handicap. Or perhaps I didn't have any feeling as definite as that—perhaps it was that I just wanted the liquor, and there it was.

Once having had the experience of this head start, I wanted it whenever opportunity offered. There was no thought of turning back. I had made a permanent departure so far as drinking was concerned.

The really significant aspect of what may seem trivial was that to sneak drinks ahead of time was not like me. I was not selfish about things, and it was always instinctive and natural for me to follow the practices of courtesy. Here, then, was an instance, even if a slight one, in which alcohol was causing a deviation from my normal behavior.

And I was already committed to concealment that would naturally lead to lying.

Lying about the Number

All these things started innocently.

"Look at Gus," somebody said. "He's on his fourth."

"I should say not," said Gus. "You're counting the one I brought in for Elsie."

"What difference does it make? It's a poor night when you don't have a fourth."

"That's so," Gus replied, "and I want it understood that the fourth is still ahead of me, see?"

Persiflage about the number of drinks ran like that, and somebody looked at me and said, "How many has old Pete had?"

And I, embarrassed under Alice's eyes, held up two fingers and said, "Only two." I laughed as I said it, and this wasn't a lie. It was part of the conventional discourse of drinking.

But pretty soon the jocose evasion, or the pretended forgetfulness, or the mock protestations were all turning into deliberate deceit. At first I would usually admit to Alice the next morning just what the extent of my drinking had been. Sometimes her comments were caustic, but it was a long time before we had real quarrels about liquor. I believe one reason real quarrels were postponed was because I stopped being frank.

In the background of my mind I classed this sort of lying along with the social deceptions and so-called white lies that are familiar to all the human race, but I was utterly wrong in so doing. Alcoholic lying belongs in a category of its own.

I had not gone far as yet, and I can still believe that my earlier lies were fairly innocent—but they were tainted with alcohol. They did not begin and end in themselves, for they were the first expressions of alcoholic thinking and the alcoholic turn of mind. Honestly confronted and described, they were symptoms.

Hair of the Dog

Long, long before Alice became troubled and critical, I had discovered the value of the classic "hair of the dog that bit you." The drink in the morning that restored, the drink in the morning that was necessary to minister to a bad feeling—here was a formula of renewal.

Hangovers became, though still regrettable, a necessary part of a drinking man's experience. Something had to be done about them. The drink in the morning was the best answer.

Many people who are not alcoholics take drinks in the morning

—sometimes—but nevertheless drinking in the morning is one of the primary badges of alcoholism. Here is a danger signal glowing bright red and visible from afar, by night or by day. If a man drinks in the morning as a means of recovery from his drinking the night before, it is possible to make a prediction concerning him that will not be far wrong.

But I Can Quit When I Like

Evasion and vacillation are conspicuous in all human behavior and it is hard to recognize them as especially important in relation to drinking. The woman who departs from her diet is not much different from the man who yields to the temptation of one more highball. We are all human.

The first time doesn't count. It isn't as bad as it seems. I'll pull myself up a bit. If I want to, I can quit right now.

It is in respect to this last that the drinker and the incipient alcoholic have their strongest argument, for when they say they can quit, the chances are that they are telling the literal truth.

It's easy to stop a man's drinking. You can stop it by locking him up. He can stop it, and generally does, for a week or a month or even longer. All alcoholics stop drinking—most of them stop repeatedly. The stopping is as common a symptom as the drinking. The problem is to remain stopped.

I remember how I used to quit drinking. Alice was pleased with me and I was pleased with myself. I could stop when I wanted to—therefore I had proposed a test and met it satisfactorily—everything was under control. So I thought, but as a matter of cold fact, I had met no test at all and had no reliable inkling whatever as to the extent of my control. Because, having stopped for a while, I invariably began again.

Alice knew even less than I about the danger signals and about my relationship to alcohol, for the reason that I, like most drinkers, kept my experience as completely as possible secret to myself. If a suspicion arose that liquor might be playing too large a part in my life, I had only myself to satisfy, and I was easily convinced by

rationalizations and evasions that would not have gone over with Alice if she had been possessed of full information. I let her into my problem—and I denied then that it was a problem—only when there was some outward slip—such as having to be put to bed, or missing time at the office or an engagement with a client.

The awkwardness of the overt occasion was that it had to be explained to someone else, and with reasoning of a sounder sort than I used on myself. But even here the rationalization was usually successful in the end. I was plausible and my stories were plausible, because alcoholism was still a mere hazy ghost of a threat, nothing that was likely to happen to *me*; and because I was bright enough and resourceful enough to tell plausible stories. The alcoholic is likely to be an intellectually able and articulate person. Even if he is not possessed of a formal education, he has a native dynamism that spills over.

All this I put down here, *before any of the major developments of my alcoholism*, because it is precisely at this phase, in advance of serious trouble, that danger signals may be of use; and because it is significant that early changes in habit and viewpoint may find an ultimate development and explanation in terms of alcoholism. The fact that, at the moment, there need be no such inevitable chain of cause and effect, of beginning and end, is far less important than the fact that there very well may be. In my own case, as I shall proceed to show, there was what now appears an inevitable sequence. But I was not looking for danger signals, and if anyone had called them to my attention I would not have observed them.

One reason for this, of course, was that I refused utterly to recognize anything in common between myself, who had been drunk many times, and other men whom I had seen drunk. Even at the stage of which I am now writing, I might well have remembered the drunks I had seen as a boy, and compared my situation to theirs. The young man wearing pointed shoes in the park, who so frightened the tailor's wife—surely I might have felt now some stirring of an alcoholic bond between him and me. But no, not at

this time or later, not until much, much later when all had been painfully laid bare, did I discover any relationship running from me to the alcoholic kinship of the world at large.

If I had been able to suspect such a kinship through some secret process of intuition, I would have denied it and refused to acknowledge it to myself. For I was different.

I might get drunk at times, but still I was different.

My own case was distinct and special.

The drinker never sees himself as others see him, and the deliberate mental twist or evasion that enables himself to preserve his confidence in his own difference, and his own independence of general weaknesses and defeats, is capable of being enlarged and distorted as alcoholic thinking replaces the normal processes of which he was once capable. Once you surrender realistic thinking, it is hard to get back.

Another reason for my failure to look for or to consider the possibility of real danger signals *for me* was that my early experiences with alcohol obviously had no useful relationship to anything that came after. As in the experience of so many other men and women, I made my acquaintance with liquor in ways that were circumstantial and irrelevant—so obviously so that the irrelevance was continually apparent. When something of this sort is irrelevant, it is likely also to be reassuring.

This is important to understand, since young men and young women are apt to assume, after they have tried alcohol on a few occasions without unpleasant consequence, that they have nothing to worry about. If the old theory of the hell-and-brimstone preachers were correct, this might be the interval of decision—one drink and the open road to ruin, total abstinence and salvation.

It is precisely to illustrate the fact that early experiences are no likely clue or guide to later experiences, that I have set forth my own in detail.

But at some time the continuing relationship between man and alcohol is formed. If it is not the fruit of that first curiosity, or the first experimenting and discovery, it must take shape after the novelty has gone, when the individual is making further adjust-

ments with the world around him, himself, and the people who count in his associations.

To identify the beginning while it is still the beginning and no more is a supreme problem. How difficult it is one may judge by the difficulty of identifying the beginning even after one knows the end.

What I have written here, however, should be of direct import and of some usefulness. As I have said, in my story so far, nothing much has happened to me yet. Here is my beginning, while it was that and no more.

The value for anyone else must come in the willingness and ability to accept such danger signals as these I have identified in an objective sense, even though to the person involved they are intensely subjective. The sneaked drink, once taken, stands as an overt thing; the reasoning as to why and how it happened is of no importance. The alcoholic lie, once told, is also an event that stands by itself, regardless of excuse or extenuation. And the pick-me-up in the morning, no matter who takes it, Tom, or Dick, or Harry, or you, or me, is a red flag that ought to bring any of us up short.

Let's omit the self-justification, the reasons why in this special case everything is different, the tortuous explanations to reassure oneself. Let's agree, while our thinking is still normal, to call a spade a spade.

Because the danger arises within oneself, it is no different from the outward danger of being on a railroad track when a locomotive is coming.

Don't pay attention to your thoughts on the subject. Pay attention to what you are doing.

3. *An Unseen Stranger in My House*

THE time of prohibition was soon to become foreshortened in retrospect; it played a small part in the life of Alice and me. It affected the way in which I courted alcoholism—which was with a jauntier air than might have been the case otherwise—but not the final result.

After the repeal of prohibition came the era of frankness. The world was in a state of economic depression but the human mind, at least, was free. "Debunking" was already an old word, but it had helped us to this emancipation. Illusions were at a discount. Anyone with inhibitions was carrying excess baggage.

The old saloons with swinging doors and free lunch and back rooms had gone, which meant that the sort of place young people did not like to be seen in had gone. The new cocktail lounge, tavern, or supper club was in a contemporary mode. It had comfort, allure, fashion. It was precisely the sort of place anyone, young or old, other things being equal, would like to be seen in.

Alcohol was in good standing again, and obviously the experience of prohibition had prepared the way. It is likely that there was broader social sanction for drinking than ever before, a sanction that suggested itself in our lives indirectly as well as directly. The individual was expected to accept responsibility, and in many cases he did and the result was no one else's business. Any concept of freedom requires a large degree of individual responsibility.

So we no longer drank unpedigreed whisky out of china cups, or raw Jersey lightning, or so-called French rye out of glasses from

the kitchen or the bathroom. But we and our friends behaved pretty much the same.

The first time I saw Freddie Luke, a blond young man who had a job in a brokerage house, was at an informal dinner dance at a small country club in a resort town where we went sometimes. We were still living in Boston, and sometimes in hot weather we drove around in the evening and had a good time at places of this kind where we were known. Freddie knew some of the same people we did, and soon made it clear that he was on the loose and intended to have a happy holiday—which meant, of course, a liberal consumption of liquor to help the happy time along.

I wish I could remember the best examples of Freddie's wit after he had primed himself thoroughly, but the trouble is that by the light of day and sobriety, so long afterward, his funny sayings might not seem funny at all. They might fall flat.

As to my own, I am equally uncertain. I know I said things that provoked laughter at the time, and Freddie seemed to consider me a congenial equal. Together, it seemed, we could entertain and charm all comers. I knew he was more than half drunk, but I was not very far along—oh, not far along at all.

It did not occur to me that one of the changes in fashion and custom was that young men who became drunk were no longer hustled out of the way, as my friend Murphy had been in the old days, but were encouraged to make a show of themselves. To be sure of amused attention, it seemed, a man needed only plenty of liquor; and the prettiest girls would be among those most interested and amused.

I did not feel that Freddie Luke, whom I liked on first acquaintance, had made a show of himself, and I was indignant when, on the way home, Alice assured me that he had.

"Why do you pick on the guy?" I asked her. "He was doing all right. He wasn't putting anything on—it was just how things happened to come into his head."

"Yes, I know," said Alice. "And the way things happened to come into your head."

That was it. She didn't care anything about Freddie, and if I.

hadn't joined in with him, she might have thought he was amusing. But she was down on me.

"I wasn't pickled," I said.

"Whatever you call it," Alice retorted, "you were drunk—good and drunk."

"It may have looked so," I told her, "and I'm sorry. I was only trying to play up to Freddie a little. I liked the guy. I could see he wanted to have a good time."

"You were drunk," said Alice. "You're drunk now."

"What's your trouble?" I asked her. "Are you jealous or something? Was I giving the eye to some other girl?"

"Please! All I want now is to get home as soon as possible."

"Tell me why you think I'm drunk."

"If you could hear yourself talk!" she said, and after that she was silent no matter how I argued and railed at her.

This conversation, reproduced after many years, is substantially correct. The essence of it all was that Alice had looked at Freddie and me with her clear eyes and had observed that we were, no matter what term might be best to use, drunk. The degree might be arguable, but the drunkenness was there. As for me, the degree seemed all-important. I was indignant, as at a false accusation. I needed to justify myself.

And so we quarreled, and since Alice had not relished the scene at the club—she had seen some nice people looking on with more disgust than amusement—the quarrel was a good one.

This time was different, and I suppose that is why I can remember it clearly. Always before, there had been only we two, Alice and I, but now there was a trio, she and I and alcohol. The episode was not a final change, but it was a kind of landmark, and after a series of such landmarks had been passed, our life could not be the same again.

My resentment spilled over into the next week, for I could be pig-headed. Even after I had become completely sober, I was sure that Alice had accused me unjustly. Drunk? No, no, only a little edge, deliberately magnified for the sake of an evening's fun. I knew what it was to be drunk. Being drunk was quite different.

I dropped into a bar after work, hoping there would be someone around that I knew. The only familiar face I saw was that of Old Pappy, not an old man at all, but a man of about my own age who worked in the accounting department and was actively disliked by many of us, including myself. Under ordinary circumstances, it would have been unthinkable for me to have a drink with Old Pappy. If there is anything in social drinking, it is the association of congenial company—that's what the word social means.

This drinking I did with Old Pappy must, therefore, have been something different. I am certain now that it was. I drank in earnest, and disliked my companion as much after the third drink as before the first. My aim at the moment was liquor for liquor's sake, which is not a legitimate aim of the social drinker.

Before I left, I said to Old Pappy, "Don't worry, I won't tell anyone you were loaded."

"Loaded?" he said. "I haven't had as much as you."

"Tight as a tick!" I said, and left him. He had served his purpose. I hadn't had to drink alone, not absolutely alone.

When I got home, Alice did not say anything. She knew I had consumed more liquor than usual, but she gave no indication that she knew. That's one of the ways wives have.

Another time we were out with the Kindners and noticed a constraint between them; they were too deliberately polite to be natural. But it was only later in the evening, when Walt was driving us home, that the facts emerged. The drinks we had had after dinner did their relaxing work, so that Nell felt like saying what was in her mind. She began riding Walt, and at first he was resentful, but then he began laughing and answering her with mock seriousness, after which she laughed and went in for playful exaggerations. We were all laughing.

Their quarrel had not been about liquor but about some personal, trivial-important household thing. I think Nell accused Walt of being untidy in the bathroom, of throwing bath towels on the floor and leaving a ring around the tub. When they brought these private matters out into the open, we liked them better and felt we knew them better. They shared their intimacies with us.

Alcohol did this, and alcohol could patch up a quarrel as well as make one. After we were home, Alice was in good humor and we were ourselves as we had been since our marriage and meant always to be.

Then there was another night when we had friends at our house, and they didn't go home, and they didn't go home. The only thing to do was to serve them more drinks. I would have stopped, so far as I was concerned, but it wasn't polite to stop. So I kept on with them. The last thing I remember was that, for some reason, it had become important for me to lean far, far out through the kitchen window. Was I trying to reach something on the ground? Very likely. I don't remember. But eventually I slipped right out across the window sill and somehow flopped over in the grass. The evening was sweet and warm with summer, the grass was comfortable. I thought of rousing myself but it was too much trouble. I slept.

I was still lying under the kitchen window the next morning, though Alice had spread a blanket over me and put a pillow under my head. She said later that it didn't seem necessary to ask for help to have me lugged into the house and stretched out on a bed—and she was good-natured about it and even, in some way that I couldn't be sure of, seemed to think the whole thing was funny. Our guests, I learned, had gone home without even missing me, too bemused by alcohol to have helped Alice much if she had asked them.

Alice knew, of course, that I had not intentionally made myself drunk. I regarded myself as a victim of circumstances, and this too she thought was rather funny. She was a reasonable human being, not nagging or inflexible or self-righteous—although she could be emotional and she could nag when something or someone stirred her sufficiently. Later on I was to blame her for some of my alcoholic troubles, but it is not in alcoholism alone that a man needs a scapegoat and finds one through resentment and self-pity rather than through reason or fact. I should have remembered this particular incident as a symbol of Alice's tolerance and indulgence of my vagaries, but for a long time it was one of the last things I wanted to remember.

I missed the importance of another element of the situation also: I had become drunk without meaning to. If you do something without volition, there is certainly a loss of control.

This episode was far from typical, but it was soon followed by others that would be recognized by any alcoholic. I took a few drinks after leaving the office, I lost track of time, I wanted to prolong a pleasant experience, I slipped over the borderline into semi-intoxication or intoxication without the slightest intention of allowing myself to do so.

I can't say how this happened the first time, or when. It is hard to persuade yourself to answer strictly any leading question as to your own intentions in some dubious matter. Did you mean to or didn't you? Were you really willing or was it a moment of carelessness or failure to resist? Did you put up a sham resistance? Are you kidding yourself now or were you kidding yourself then?

On the basic question of drunkenness, you'll settle it either way that best suits your self-esteem. Yet no matter how you agree with yourself to arrange the explanation of what has happened, there is an outer reality. When all is said and done, a time had come when I was getting drunk without wanting to, without recognizing the danger, without attending to the element of duration, instead of happily pursuing an experience on terms of my own choosing.

Guilt

The stranger in my house was not the substance known as alcohol but a fantasy that I myself brought into existence chiefly through a sense of guilt. Guilt led to deceit, but Alice could be deceived only part of the time and ultimately not at all.

The sense of guilt did not make its appearance abruptly on a particular day that can be identified and recalled but, like so many other elements in the pattern of alcoholism, subtly and by almost indistinguishable degrees.

I don't remember that Alice ever demanded, as the wives of drinkers are supposed to do, "Where were you last night?" Or: "Drunk again today, weren't you?" Or: "Where did you go after you left the office?" She did say sometimes: "Say, how many

drinks have you had, anyway?" I began lying to her when a tugging sensation of guilt made me ashamed to tell the truth.

But the questioning was most often in her eyes, and this was how it happened more and more. She was not looking for an answer from me. She was seeking the answer for herself. She could tell what shape I was in. She could estimate pretty closely the extent of my drinking, though not so closely as she thought. I contrived ways of preventing her from knowing.

One Washington's Birthday I crawled out of bed with all the grumbling misery of a hangover. The night before, in anticipation of a day of idleness and no responsibilities, I had stayed up late drinking B. & B., benedictine and brandy, with a group of our friends. Nothing was easier for me to drink through a sociable evening but the after-effect was bad. Morning brought the need for a good stiff whisky as soon as possible, and I slipped downstairs and got one, or two, and experienced the anticipated revival—as if disintegration had been avoided by a narrow margin.

I covered my tracks well and was sure that Alice knew nothing about the morning drinks; but later in the day she called to me, "Pete, what happened to that bottle of rye in the cupboard?"

"How should I know?" I snapped back.

"Now if you don't, who does?"

"So you're checking up on me," I said with a good deal of resentment.

"I am not," said Alice, without losing her good nature. She could be exasperatingly patient. "I had to get the cooking sherry, which meant moving the bottle of rye, and how could I help noticing that something had happened to it since yesterday? Why the mystery? If you gave somebody a drink or if you had a drink or two yourself, why not say so?"

But she wasn't being frank, for she knew why I didn't want to say so. I didn't want to admit sneaking the drinks that morning, along with the disclosure that was necessarily involved. Alice knew what it meant when I needed this quick prescription for a hangover. I was guilty and therefore guiltily anxious to cover up.

After that I made it a matter of custom to keep an extra bottle

or two in the cellar, the attic, or the garage—any place where Alice would not come across them. I varied the repository because this seemed the smart thing to do. I couldn't be cornered again. I wouldn't be answerable to Alice for every drink I took, or in a situation which gave her a chance to cross-question me.

The unseen stranger was by no means a constant presence in our household, for some years at least, because alcohol, though I no longer controlled my drinking, was still subordinate. There were long periods when I drank little or not at all. We had our first baby. My older son may now consider himself an eye-witness, though not for a long time aware of the one special difference between his home surrounding and another's. We pursued our life together, and it seemed a natural, settled sort of thing that would grow and develop as year succeeded year. Alice and I talked of plans for the future and looked ahead to a promise that, though obscure, seemed full of pleasant possibilities and sure to be faithfully performed.

We thought of ourselves as normal. We lived in a state of order in a civilized time, with the evidences of a vigorous, healthy, successful American way of life around us. We were part of a wonderful system, as one branch of mathematics is part of a complete and ordered whole; but, since our plane was organic, the branches of our system were more vitally and usefully related. We would naturally share in the happiness and success of the whole.

In some such way as this, I think, any family looks at others, at the segment of society round about, and gains the same assurance that one may gain from looking at a reflection in a mirror. But each outlooking family selects the most desirable aspects it can see and, from these, forms a rationalized and idealized image that it chooses to accept as its own. So easily an assurance is accepted that may be cruelly false and, where alcoholism is concerned, is sure to be false.

I left the office one windy March afternoon, intending to get home as quickly as possible, settle down with Alice to listen to the radio, maybe read a little, and then go to bed early. I remember thinking that such blustery weather, unfit for anything else, was

a great reinforcer of domesticity. It was the sort of old-fashioned weather that tied us to the legend of our grandparents.

I went down in the elevator with a salesman we called Mac because he was Scotch, but his name was unrelated to this prefix.

"Snowing yet?" he asked.

"I don't think so. Is it going to?"

"That's what the radio says."

We walked out of the building together. It was snowing a little, the powdery, dry particles blowing along the sidewalks like dust.

"Wow!" I said.

"This is impossible," said Mac. "Let's stop for a snort."

"Sorry to miss a drink that would possibly be at your expense," I said, grinning, "but the only thing I want right now is to get home and damn quick about it."

"I would even buy you one, maybe," he said.

We walked along together, bucking the wind. The bitter cold stung and numbed our ears and cheeks. The street was gloomy, home-bound pedestrians walking rapidly as we were, coat collars up, heads down against the wind. Within a few minutes we were near a bleak, dark corner around which we could, if we wished, find a warmly glowing business men's restaurant and cocktail bar, Simmy Webber's. Mac looked at me and I looked at him. His face was tight and pinched in the yellow light reflected from show-windows and street lamps—mine must have been that way too.

Without a word we swung around the corner into Simmy Webber's. It was good to be out of the cold. We undid our coats.

"A little of that winter stuff at a time is enough," Mac remarked. "My people die of exposure more easily than they did in the old days."

"It's a death to be avoided, Mac, my friend," said I. "I will break my journey here for ten minutes. What was that you said about buying me one?"

"Did I mention anything of the sort? I don't recall," said Mac. "I don't think you heard right."

We stood at the bar, kidding in a friendly way, and ordered Scotch and plain water, not too much water. It tasted good. I still

had not the slightest intention of stopping for more than one drink. I was so sure I was to be home early that I already felt the homeward sensations, the repetition of all the necessary steps and actions. I was wrapped up in the journey, impatient to have it over.

I had not finished my drink when something was put down on the bar beside me, a copy of a book wrapped in an evening newspaper pretty well soaked with melted snow. I looked around and saw a newcomer standing there, a middle-aged salesman—at least I took him for a salesman—whom I had seen before. He was opening his coat, shaking it. He nodded to me, and I moved over. I noticed that his book was *Gone With the Wind*.

"We're all gone with it," I said.

"What?" he asked.

"The wind," I said.

"What are you drinking?" he wanted to know, and I told him.

It was natural for me to linger and have another, especially as the salesman and Mac fell into a lively conversation. Countless times I had stopped for a drink or two under circumstances as casual and not much different from these, and nothing untoward had resulted. My experience suggested no need for caution. What caution should I consider? I was in full control of my faculties, my will and inclination were as strongly set toward home as ever. The interruption might be continued a few minutes longer, but then I would surely be on my way.

What changed my mind? So far as I know, nothing ever did change it. I must have gradually stopped remembering. Or, perhaps, quite suddenly, as the strand of a rope gives way.

I am not sure that I remember a third drink or anything else about the evening except the bar, the book wrapped in wet newspaper, the salesman shaking his coat, Mac laughing with some tremendous amusement. When I next became aware of being alive, and of things around me that could be seen and heard, I was sitting on a hard, curving bench such as one associates with a railroad station. I came awake painfully and with difficulty.

I felt awful. Is there any other word so perfect for a hangover? The abysmal feeling inside, the aching depression and apprehen-

sion, the complete lack of physical tone. I was a lump of badly coordinated cells trying to answer weakly a sort of ashamed rollcall of what I, as a man, had been accustomed to regard as a higher intelligence. Where was my higher intelligence now—in my aching, foggy head, or my foul-tasting mouth, or my betrayed, hateful stomach?

A railroad station. All the signs were present, but I did not recognize the place. A clock on the wall said that the time was a little after six—which must have been six in the morning. Presumably I had got off or been put off some night train. The news stand was not open. A light in one ticket window glowed dimly. A station guard strolled around dispiritedly, not even glancing in my direction. I wanted to know where I was but I did not want to ask so revealing a question.

I tried to straighten my coat and something fell to the floor—a book. It wracked me to pick the book up, and my head started aching more violently, but I did pick it up—a copy of *Gone With the Wind*. It made me remember a little of the night before, but how I had gained possession of the salesman's book I could not guess. I managed to correlate a few reluctant responses of the muscles and went outside on the station platform where a gray morning light lay without cheer over a snowy and sodden stretch of tracks and wasteland.

Through the haze I saw docks, a small steamer, water beyond, and I thought I smelled the tide. I didn't see a sign on the station platform at once but off beyond, rising into the sky, was some vast structure of a bridge. More puzzled than ever, I finally found the identifying legend on the station—New London. I could not have been more puzzled or amazed, for I had no associations whatever with New London other than having looked from the window of trains that stopped there on the Shore Line run between Boston and New York.

Of course I thought of Alice at home with two children, two young boys, the sons who are now reading these words; it occurred to me that perhaps they, sensing their mother's anxiety, might be fretful and disturbed. In any case Alice would have sat up all

night, waiting for me, calling the police, getting in touch with my friends, while her desperation grew. To think of her was to suffer the humiliation of my own shame. I had degraded myself into a walking nothingness. Somehow I had been transported safely to New London, Connecticut, and presumably I had gone through the motions of a human being, but actually I had absented myself all these hours from the humanity that has mind and heart and intention.

My self-accusation added to the misery of the hangover, but I could not think clearly. My head was too muddled, the suffering of my body tugged for undivided attention. It was cold out of doors and I went back inside the station. Nobody had disturbed the copy of *Gone With the Wind* and I picked it up. A man carrying a book would look at least as if he might be going somewhere, not like a complete bum.

There were telephone booths in the station and I could have put in a call for Alice. I felt in my pocket and found I still had my wallet and some money. I knew I should call Alice but I just didn't, not then. The whole thing was too horrible—I made myself a sort of spectator as well as actor. What I needed most was a drink. If I could only minister to my awful condition with that morning medicine, a shot of the same! But I didn't suppose it was possible to get a drink anywhere in New London at that hour; I knew it wasn't likely that I, looking as I did, could get one.

And so I waited. I waited until the station and the city came alive for the day. The news stand opened and I bought a morning paper. I explored and found a bar where I could be the first customer when the doors were opened. I gave my miserable lump of cells what each, individually, seemed to crave and need, gritted my teeth, shook my head, and felt that I was, at least, coming alive again.

At last I put through a long-distance call to Alice, vainly hoping for some sound in her voice that would contradict what I knew of her inevitable anxiety through the black night. What could I tell her? I said I would explain later. She knew then, of course, that the trouble was alcohol, but all the long journey home I thought and

thought how to make my story plausible or to give it some shadow of justification.

Its only chance, I thought, was the complete absence of intention or motive. How could I have wronged my wife and children in this way, since I, as an aware and responsible person, had ceased for long hours to exist at all?

I made a complete and candid confession, and Alice, in whose nature there was no possibility of retreat or rejection, forgave me. She not only forgave me but was sorry for me, sorry for my humiliation and self-hatred. She accepted what was past and, unasked, took upon herself some of the responsibility for the future. She made me feel that part of her strength was, from now on, my own.

But to my guilt there was now joined her insecurity. I had introduced it into our home. My guilt and her insecurity—they went together, lurking secretly, seldom acknowledged, ghostlike yet claiming their part in our daily lives.

My penitence was sincere and for some months I drank little or not at all. But as little now as before did I associate myself with the drunks I had known, or with any collective experience of men and women with alcohol and alcoholism. True, I had slipped into a blank and fugitive alcoholic state, but this was an accident, no more likely to be repeated than running an automobile into a fence. I was, as always, a special case.

I was a special case because I was myself. A man has and must have a belief in his own conquest of circumstance—not all circumstance, but certainly that involving his own appetites and actions. He may like to lean on his wife, but she becomes part of himself, and he is often unaware of the respects in which he leans upon her most.

Not only did I see myself as a separate and competent individual whose integrity must carry him through hazards that tripped other men, but I overlooked one of the most significant aspects of my misadventure. At first I had made myself drunk intentionally, later I had done so unintentionally, and now I had done so against intention and against firm determination. How could I have missed the progression that his sequence now so unmistakably suggests?

Some time later I saw the salesman with whom Mac and I had been drinking at Simmy Webber's, and told him I had his copy of *Gone With the Wind*.

"How did your wife like it?" he wanted to know.

"What?"

"I asked you how your wife liked the book. Did she or didn't she?"

"Sure she liked it," I told him. "She had read it long ago."

He laughed, but I guess he saw how puzzled I was. "You must have been drunker than I thought," he explained. "You practically forced me to lend you the book because you said your wife was crazy to read it."

That accounted for the book, at any rate, but I never did discover how I happened to go to New London.

So I Stopped Drinking

I could stop if I wanted to, and I now wanted to very badly, in order to rise in Alice's estimation, and therefore I did. A month or two went by and it was perfectly clear that I had my drinking under control.

"I don't even miss it," I told her.

"I'm glad you don't," she said. "You had me worried."

"I could see that."

"More worried than you suspected," she told me.

"I could see that too."

We both laughed. But now the incident was closed and I was sure that, with such an experience to caution me, I would take care to handle my liquor as a man of intelligence should. I had learned my lesson.

I would return to the ranks of social drinkers where I belonged and never again slip out on the sort of holiday that was the traditional province of the soak. The return, or so it seemed, was due to the fact that social drinking was natural and pleasant, not because of any alcoholic craving on my part.

At the same time, I knew that I was glad to be back in a groove I liked. It had been a temporary satisfaction, a reward of virtue, to

pass up a lunch-hour cocktail or a drink with some friend after the business day, but such satisfaction ran thin. So did the sort of abstinence that left me standing with a glass of ginger ale or iced tea at an evening or weekend party when Alice and our friends were relaxing with the help of drinks that have a different and livelier reputation.

Alice was quite willing that I should drink again providing I did as so many of our friends did, using alcohol as it was surely intended to be used. She said she wasn't happy to see me left out of things at social gatherings, and she knew it was awkward not to drink with my friends in the city—sometimes.

"How much liquor will you allow yourself?" she asked me.

A woman, especially a wife, can be awkwardly direct. I had not thought of drinking under any sort of ration system. But I rallied and said, "Not too many drinks at any one time. It all depends."

"I suppose it does," she admitted.

We agreed that the principle was one of moderation, not of arithmetic. This would have been an adequate understanding of the whole situation a year or so earlier, but we were now behind the times. Moderation is related to the point of view.

I was now a drinker of considerable experience and of an advanced capacity. I could drink a lot more without showing it or without feeling it than would have been possible some time back. To put the matter differently, I had built up an increasing tolerance—and what was to be the relationship between this increased tolerance for alcohol and my ideas, or Alice's ideas, of moderation?

To have a drink and stop gave me no real satisfaction. To have several drinks and stop was admirable—but was it moderation?

I intended to watch myself and my drinking with extreme care, and it seemed to me that Alice was too easily worried. She did not understand how little a drink or two affected me, and her view of moderation was womanly, timid, and too restrictive. In order not to feel her critical gaze or stir anxious forebodings in her heart, I didn't let her know too much about my consumption of alcohol. This seemed perfectly fair, since I had made the rules myself and

was living up to them honestly. I wasn't getting drunk, and I wasn't bunching my drinks too thickly.

For a while I was able to experience the consciousness of rectitude that comes so pleasantly to mankind. This was as gratifying as the sense of guilt had been disquieting before. How could I know that, except for the element of self-deceit, both were the same thing?

It seemed to me that I was thinking rationally and doing a fairly decent job. But a man's observation of the world around him, and especially of his own doings, is possible only through the intermediary of his senses and his reason—everything is filtered through these processes of his perception and thinking. And as an intermediary I had become a badly biased witness.

Even at best, with clearest sight and greatest honesty, the *self* is limited, incomplete, and subject to distortions of emphasis and interpretation in its reportorial work for its own use. Luckily, many happenings and personalities are discussed with other people so that their conclusions are used to check and modify one's impressions. But here, as to my own conduct, I was excluding all outside observation or opinion. I was reserving to myself the whole judgment of myself—and giving myself prejudiced and false reports.

Nothing can be more certain than that in the matter of alcohol, once it is a problem or threatens to become one, an individual who wants the truth must consult an outside point of view. He must get someone else in on the act.

The catch is, of course, that the individual will not want the truth. That is part of the self-deceit. What the drinker is really afraid of is learning that he ought to cut down on his drinking to the point of deprivation, or stop drinking entirely.

"I am an intelligent man," I said to myself.

This was true—but it proved the opposite of what I meant to indicate, for an intelligent man is a greater master of self-deceit than an unintelligent one. He can turn things upside down and inside out with an ingenuity that is far more marvelous than sleight-of-hand.

So this was how I straightened things out and determined to keep them in balance—by hiding the facts from Alice and by fooling myself—and by drinking just about as much as I pleased but with extreme care not to get into trouble.

Going along on this system, it was fully three months before I missed a Monday at the office.

"I did take a little too much," I said to Alice, wondering if she knew how awful I felt, and how my head was splitting.

"You took a lot too much," she said, not severely, but in a tone I didn't like.

"Now," I told her, "don't be jumping at conclusions."

What I told myself was that I had gone just a little over the edge. The hangover might seem a fierce one, but that wasn't the whole story by any means. Just a little over the edge . . .

Luckily Alice knew there was no use lecturing me while I was in my present condition—and perhaps not at all—and the subject was dropped between us for the time being. I tortured myself by denying myself a drink that Monday morning, bringing myself around with black coffee, cigarettes that wouldn't taste right, and bad temper. The fact that I did not satisfy my hangover with the alcohol it was crying for, an act of will power if there ever was one, gave me a feeling of martyrdom. I could be abusive to Alice with a clear conscience, especially since she showed plainly that she thought me guilty of having fallen or jumped into the old pit. I knew myself that I hadn't. I might have slipped a little, but the whole thing was insignificant and no reason for Alice to act like judge and jury.

One thing I did realize as days went on. I was back again in the sort of life and the sort of drinking that had been habitual before my New London journey. Well, what was the matter with that? I had been pretty normal before, and I would be pretty normal now.

The Human Fly

I have referred once, in trying to present some picture of my college days, to the boy named Brownshaw who did amusing things when he was drunk. He was the one who undressed while climbing the stairs of the dormitory, and posed silently at night in

downtown Boston in order to mortify the flesh. I had never expected to see Brownshaw again, but one day he appeared at the office.

He had changed a lot. Though I recognized him at once, it was with surprise that approached incredulity. He had become a man of distinction of a sort, by virtue of tweeds, a pipe, a small mustache with waxed ends, and a manner that may perhaps be described as literary. I gathered that he was posing still, and had made himself a figure to be noticed.

We shook hands, laughed a little about things that had happened in our irresponsible youth, and agreed to meet for a drink and dinner. I had to work late, as it happened, and I had already told Alice that it was doubtful when I could get home. Just the same, I called her again before I left the office, told her about Brownshaw, and said that I would see her around nine o'clock. Everything was aboveboard, rational, intelligently planned.

When Brownshaw kept our engagement, he brought Murphy in order to make a trio of old companions. Murphy had become a lawyer and I had seen him occasionally, though we were never close friends. Somehow, though, the presence of Brownshaw made things different, especially after the second round of Martinis. We were all three better friends than we had realized. The old days were good, mellow, golden, and memorable days, and we brought them to life again.

I was thoroughly aware of what I was doing—as much so as a player in a baseball game, or a skater on ice. Part of the enjoyment was that I had everything under control. I had always been the best-balanced—Murphy and Brownshaw had gone overboard ridiculously, but not I. We were late sitting down to dinner, and I telephoned Alice again, telling her that I would probably be home later than I had expected.

Everything under control, no danger anywhere. Brownshaw knew an extremely choice little place where the bartender was an artist, and we went there after dinner. I never did remember much about the place or what happened while we were there, but I do know that between six and seven the next morning, Brownshaw was

climbing the outside of an office building while Murphy held his hat and coat and I held his pipe.

There had been a good deal in the newspapers about human flies and their stunts. They went the flagpole-sitters one better by introducing the element of action. One of these acrobatic exhibitionists would scale an almost perpendicular surface while crowds gasped and cameras ground. Brownshaw declared that he was a human fly and to prove the point would go up the outside of any office building like a cat.

The spot chosen was an easy one, for between the courses of ornamental brick or tile there was good opportunity to find footholds and handholds; just the same Brownshaw, in his condition, might have been seriously injured or killed if a policeman had not come along and ended the act while the human fly was still no more than twelve or fifteen feet from the sidewalk. Perhaps we deserved to be arrested, but the policeman merely ordered us to be off while he scattered the early-morning crowd we had collected.

The three of us had breakfast, and Brownshaw and Murphy saw me to my office a little past nine o'clock. We said good bys in the corridor. I had not realized the state I was in but the consternation of the other men at the office showed that they considered me an unpalatable sight. They hustled me into the men's washroom and I spent most of the morning there, kept carefully out of circulation. By afternoon I had recovered somewhat, though I felt much worse, and I had been taken to a barber shop to benefit by whatever a barber could do for me.

Later Charlie Hessel, one of the copywriters, said to me, "Do you know the color of the belly of a fish?"

I did.

"That's what your face looked like," he assured me, "only a fish washes and you hadn't. You hadn't shaved for a week either."

"A day," I said.

"It looked like a week," he said.

When I arrived home that night, my first intention was to apologize to Alice for not having telephoned her when it became clear at last that I would have to stay in town overnight. You see, I had a

story, though not a convincing one, that I hoped to make her believe, at least for the present. Confession could come later.

"You did call me," she said. "You called me and your friends called me, and among the three of you, nobody in this house got more than a few consecutive minutes of sleep all night long."

Even when she told me this, I could muster no more than a faint memory of the night hours during which, because of my anxiety on Alice's account, I had telephoned to reassure her, and had allowed Brownshaw and Murphy to telephone her. Worst of all, she could see I didn't remember. She did not know all the details as yet, but she knew the central truth.

I was penitent. I was even more contrite than the occasion, viewed later on, seemed to warrant. I loved Alice. I loved my sons. I felt great pride in my family and my home.

There was only one thing to do, and I did it.

I Quit Drinking Again

"I can stop drinking any time I want to."

Who is this speaking? It is I. Perhaps it is some man from next door, or a stranger met on the train, saying my words. It is almost any alcoholic, or any person in danger of alcoholism. Famous, famous words. Let my sons learn now how old and worn they are, how often hollow.

As I have said before, they express a genuine truth. But one trouble is that to speak them is not much different from saying, "I can't stop drinking unless I want to."

Do I want to? Do you want to, my chance acquaintance, or my friend? Will my sons want to, at some future time? It may be helpful to consider the question even now. Does any drinker who enjoys alcoholic liquor want to stop enjoying it? Of course not!

"Wanting to" is the catch.

I wanted to stop drinking. I wanted to stay sober and make a good husband and father. I wanted to be clear-headed and to do the best work of which I was capable.

All this, in general terms, was vivid and unqualified. But it did not prevent me, at some given moment, from needing a drink.

I want to stay sober, but I need a drink.

The contradiction that appears in these twin statements is one that requires thought. So long as I have the craving, the feeling of need, I do not really want to stop drinking—not at the given moment. What I need, I want, for wanting is surely inseparable from needing. I want a drink now, because I need it.

At the same time I still want to stop drinking, but this is a more general and remoter aim with a little less urgency in the “wanting.”

The stopping can always wait a while longer. It is an ideal, long range program. The need is immediate, a thing of the moment, NOW, as jangling nerves and sick cells of my body insist.

I have always planned to call upon my willpower. I have thought of the will as a kind of bulldozer to be brought in when I really make up my mind to overcome all obstacles. *When I really make up my mind*—when will that time come? Long before then I am discovering that willpower is much more effective for accomplishing what I want than for accomplishing what I do not want.

The will helps, obviously, to subordinate various lesser desires and to push through the attainment of a greater gain in the long run. But can it ever help us do the thing, socially permissible, which we just plainly and in all honesty do not want to do?

In terms of alcoholism, at least, there is only one answer.

Yet, once again, I stopped drinking—for a while. This act of decision and of abnegation somewhat restored my self-esteem and brought an appearance of happiness to my home, but this time did not deceive Alice nor exorcise her haunting insecurity. She must have known by now that she was married to an alcoholic husband, though I doubt if her loyalty would have allowed her to admit it in plain terms. A woman married to an alcoholic husband never knows what will happen.

In reflecting upon my circumstances, it seemed to me that I had let alcohol get the best of me, and that I should knock off entirely until I could be sure of handling it better. I must have a holiday of a sort and after a while I could make a fresh, intelligently-considered thing of normal drinking. I would be like other men who drank and got by, apparently with ease.

I was aware, you see, of a physical craving for alcohol. I had trained the cells of my body to expect it, I had accustomed them to make the most of a larger and larger quantity, without many interruptions in the supply. If alcohol was habit-forming—and the smoking of cigarettes, the eating of candy, even taking a nap at noon are also habit-forming—then I had slipped into the groove too far and would have to declare some revision.

I was aware of this, for even my ingenuities of self-deceit could not disguise a conclusion so obvious to Alice and everyone else who knew me well. I could hardly be the one person to ignore what others showed me they recognized clearly.

I was not aware, however, that my bodily craving for alcohol was less important in the long run than another reliance I had come to place in it. I wasn't the fellow I wanted to be unless I could make myself so with timely doses of liquor. I had used alcohol to build up a relationship with the life of which I wanted to be a part. Physical gratification was nothing as compared to the use of alcohol for this self-administered act of creation.

It was as simple as that, though I did not know it then or for a long time. When I reassured myself that I had no concealed drive for revenge upon either of my parents, or for escape from any fantasy of long ago, or any of the other psychic forces of the underground that I had heard about second or third hand, my reassurance was complete—but wholly groundless. For me to be an alcoholic by psychic conditioning, it was not necessary to find any such dramatic mutilation from long ago.

It was necessary only for me to have placed reliance upon alcohol for adjustment to and in the competition of the world.

Liquor helped establish me with the people I must know. It protected me from unpleasant reminders. It softened anxieties. It helped me to a better opinion of myself. It seemed to give me the ability to work more effectively and longer. It was the difference between a well-rounded life and the narrow, specialized life of tensions and pressure to which otherwise I was committed.

Without liquor I was like a tightly-coiled spring from which any impact or even any stir of air could evoke shrill twanging sounds.

With the mysterious power of alcohol I had tried and was still trying to make myself a man of charm, wit, and urbanity, a man of prowess in professional life, a man not troubled by nerves, a man who would never be tempted to look back over his shoulder.

So when I stopped drinking and admitted that I missed the physical gratification, I was also experiencing this other deprivation. I was prevented from being the man I had made of myself, the man I thought I wanted to be.

It was inevitable that I should soon start drinking again, for a little while without alcohol has a wonderful way of wiping out apprehension. Liquor may have the best of other men, but I see perfectly how I can and will control it. The new page has been turned.

But I did not begin this time with Alice's consent. For a while I drank only when she was not around and when I thought she would not know. I drank moderately and decently and assured myself there was every reason to expect no more trouble. I had learned my lesson and, as an intelligent man, applied its obvious conclusions.

When Alice did find out, she made no scene; she had suspected for some time what was going on.

"If you are going to take a drink," she said, "you don't have to hide it from me. You don't, do you? I don't want you to."

"I've just been proving to myself that I can handle it," I said. "I know now that I've got it licked. I'll never go off the deep end again."

She accepted my confidence at its face value, for how could she doubt when I so obviously believed? Perhaps she too believed for a while.

But within a month I had bottles concealed in the cellar, the attic, the car, the garage—one or all at different times—and within two months came a Monday morning when I was not fit to go to the office. I was without a drink that Monday morning, for Alice was watching me and I could not get to my liquor supply.

"How long are you going to go on like this?" she asked.

I swore. I threw myself into a tantrum. What sort of perfection did she think she had married? What was she accusing me of?

Should I feel like a sinner because I had accumulated a little hang-over? How would she feel if I kept watching her like a plainclothesman, begrudging her every drink and making her feel that liquor should be measured by the drop? On I went, yackety-yacketing, almost convincing myself that it was Alice's fault my mouth tasted so badly, my head ached, and I could not remember what I had done the night before.

That Monday passed, but by now the relationship between Alice and me had changed completely and permanently. Even when our lives seemed normal, there was the stranger in our house, the unspoken awareness between us. She knew there would be a next time. She knew she must have a reserve of independence and leadership. She knew she must prepare to be responsible for the boys if need be.

To the extent that I recognized her attitude, I resented it. She had no right to be superior. Something about her seemed pushing me all the time. Pushing, watching, suspecting. When I wasn't guilty, she could make me feel guilty, and at such times I was sorry for myself.

We exposed our raw nerves to each other. We quarreled more and more. I knew that liquor was at the bottom of everything that didn't go well, but I had no intention of cutting it out again. Why should I? I was handling it all right.

When my sons suspected the truth, when they began to compare the life of their home with others, when they not only suspected but *knew*, they alone can say. I shall not ask them now. But as they read these words, they will piece together meanings that first were vague shadows long ago. They knew something for a long time, then they knew all.

This Act of Creation

There was, of course, a paradox. There almost always is where alcohol is involved.

As I have written, I was using liquor to make myself the man I thought I wanted to be. He was quite a fellow. Look at many a man who drinks in the same way and you will see some of his conspicuous attributes. He may not be as witty and urbane as he thinks, but

he does have a ready smile. If he is a bit nervous, it's because he hasn't quite licked himself into shape yet—wait until tonight. He's at his best from the cocktail hour until the hazy rim of next morning.

He's a driver. He goes at things hammer and tongs. He's at home with other men. He likes them and they like him. He has lots of things to talk about but he can discourse most feelingly about himself. He's a specialized organism, made for the competition of a high-pressure economic society.

This, I would have said, though in a somewhat different way, was what I was making myself, but at some undiscerned shadow line a change came over the pattern. The fellow I was creating was increasingly lonely, he was at odds with his wife, a good deal of the time he didn't like himself much, his general health was not good, he had no sense of well-being except after a certain amount of drinking, his temper crackled incessantly, he was moody when there was no occasion he had to rise to, he didn't like to look in the mirror in the morning.

Oddly enough, he didn't like liquor much—at least, it could not be said that he enjoyed drinking. Alcoholics don't, usually. The enjoyment they associate with drinking in the past is forever escaping them.

Yet with the drinking of every new day, it was in my mind to repeat a pleasant and helpful experience. I could not realize then that the pleasant and helpful experience I was desiring to repeat was not a recent one; it lay now far back along the years at the stage when a little liquor had given me a pleasant glow and had lifted me to a plane of agreeable assurance and even of power. I could no more repeat an experience that was gone forever than I could exhume the past itself.

But in my mind, of course, the experience was still to be had if alcohol were properly courted. Stubbornly I sought it—and for my eagerness and effort was able to attain only the different experience of the advanced drinker. The first drink or two that had meant so much in the old days, indeed that had meant all, now counted for nothing. The first drink was only what was necessary in

order to get to the second, and the second was what was necessary to get to the third.

In a sense, I was trying to repossess my youth, its response, its capacity not only for alcohol but for all sorts of challenges and realizations. I failed not because I was really growing old, but because I was now a dependent drinker. I had advanced into a deeper state of the progression of alcohol.

Small Voice

One summer evening, not early, not late, but when the dusk was beginning to gather, I walked toward my house in the New Jersey suburb with considerable uneasiness. I had made several stops on my way from the office and I knew I was not in good shape. For this I suffered a sense of guilt, yet I had stopped short of drunkenness and considerably short of starting off on a spree, and for this I suffered a sense of dissatisfaction and persecution. I was irritable. I was mean.

If good luck held, Alice wouldn't be at home. This was her day for a meeting and tea of some kind, and those things broke up late. Sometimes she fixed supper for the boys ahead of time and left something for me, and didn't get back until almost bedtime.

At first I thought I would take my chances and walk right up to the front door—but Alice might be home and I didn't relish the idea of confronting her. Maybe it would be better to skirmish around back and ease into the house. At least I could see how things were, fix myself up a little, and maybe contrive to face Alice on ground of my own choosing.

"I didn't hear you come in," she might say, without even looking at me carefully. "How were things in the city?"

And I would say, "Not bad, not bad at all. What's for a guy who's hungry?"

The light touch often worked. So I walked in by the side of the hedge that separated our yard from the next. I covered the most exposed area and was soon under the shelter of deep shadow; but in this darkness my foot struck against a child's wagon or some other object, and I tripped over into the hedge, sprawling. If I had

been really steady, I probably wouldn't have tripped. As I remained for a measurable span of time, entrapped in privet, I made out two small boys crouching a short distance away. They were playing in their own yard and I had probably scared them.

But the fright was soon over. One of the kids said to the other, "It's only Gussie's old man."

Gussie is reading these words now. He is my youngest son. Perhaps he has not come across the old nickname for a long time—at one period of his life he was called this after a character in a comic strip.

I extricated myself from the hedge and went into the house by the back door. No one was home. It turned out later that Alice had skipped the meeting and tea and had taken the boys to the early show of some educational movie.

Alone in the hollow shell of a house I gave way to bitter emotion. Tears ran down my cheeks. "It's only Gussie's old man." What would those kids say to Gussie tomorrow? What would he say to them? Was I so much of an unreliable character that anything could be expected of me? Other fathers remained upright, but I stumbled into hedges. Why not face it—I arrived home half slewed over and staggering. Why wouldn't children notice it even more readily than anyone else?

I know now that my tears were alcoholic. It was thoroughly in alcoholic character to go through all this emotion without any idea of doing anything to remedy the original situation.

Young Eyes

Another time, one winter when snow was deep on the ground, I was intent on deceiving Alice. I was not drunk. I had not even been drinking, but I did not want her to know I had just stirred around in the attic where, under a couple of loose boards, I had stowed away two pints of Bourbon against an occasion of need that something told me would arrive soon.

I was not really intending to start drinking again, but if I did, I wanted a margin to go on. There can be no torture like having a

drink or two to start things and nothing to go on with. You can find yourself racked and dying by the minute, over and over again.

I hid the liquor in the attic easily enough. Then I noticed on an old chair nearby a stocking cap of Gussie's that he must have forgotten while on a hunt for last year's hockey sticks or something of the sort. I picked up the cap and took it downstairs with me. I was in the living room with a book when Alice glanced in from the doorway. She was startled.

"This is spookie," she said. "You weren't here a minute ago. Where did you pop up from?"

Both boys were in the room with me but I didn't especially think of that. They didn't know where I had been. I smiled artfully at Alice and said, "Oh, I was just out in the side yard looking at the snow." This untruth was far from inspired but it was the best I could do at the moment.

Alice was still puzzled; she had not heard any outside door open and close. For a minute I thought her suspicions had been stirred, and this worried me. She came into the room and luckily noticed Gussie's stocking cap on a chair where I had dropped it. Immediately the subject was changed.

"There is a clothes closet for caps," Alice announced, swooping as good mothers and housewives do. "Come to think of it, I haven't seen this for weeks. Where has it been, young man?"

"I don't know," said Gussie.

"I know," said his brother, George.

"Where?" demanded Gussie.

"You dropped it in the attic when you were up after the sled or something," said George.

"In the attic?" said Alice. "Then how in the world did it travel down here?"

"I don't know," said George.

Gussie didn't say anything, but I thought he looked at me with unusual attention. I looked back at him. So we are peering at each other now, across the years, while he reads these words. I wonder if he remembers. For all I could tell, his glance was wholly innocent.

The terrible thing was that I would never know. In another moment Alice had left the room with the stocking cap and the incident was over. No, not wholly over.

Had Gussie noticed me bringing in the cap and dropping it? Probably not. His head was in a book. Even if he had noticed, he wouldn't have listened to the exchange between Alice and me. He wouldn't know that I had just come down from the attic and lied about it. But just as I was convincing myself of this, I reflected how shrewd and observant children were, how little they missed of what went on around them.

My misery was complete. There was no use arguing and rationalizing that the episode was trivial and would blow over in no time. I could only wonder through years to come what Gussie had observed, and what he thought of me. Now, at any rate, he knows the whole truth. I want him to be understanding, and for that reason I have not been tempted to hold back this story.

The Sad Party

My son George had been made captain of a nature group that formed one of the activities at his school. He collected the leaves of all the different trees, kept lists of birds, discoursed at the dinner table about the influence of climate and rainfall, and at twelve was an ardent supporter of the U. S. Soil Conservation Service. He knew a lot more about it than I did. I hope he will smile as he recognizes this portrait.

A time came when I learned, through listening to family conversation, that the nature group was planning a party. Evidently it was to be quite an affair. George was showing more enthusiasm than he had about anything else. I assumed that the great event was to take place at our house, in fact when George said something about the outdoor part of the festivities, I suggested that Charlie, the handy man, could get the yard all fixed up.

"Oh, we're not having it here," said George.

"No," said Alice, "the party is to be at the Hewsons'."

"I don't get it," I said. "George is the captain, isn't he?"

"Sure I'm the captain," said George.

"Well, then," I persisted, "I don't see why he doesn't have the party right here on the home grounds."

"What difference does it make?" Alice wanted to know.

"It does make a difference," I told her.

"No it doesn't," said George.

I would have gone on with the debate if Alice had not given me a signal. There was something wrong about the deal, and I began to suspect what it was. When Alice and I were alone, I started in again.

"Out with it," I said. "Let's have it all open and clear, what's the matter with our place for a nature party?"

"There's nothing the matter with it."

"Well, then, how did the thing get crossed up? Have I been off the wagon lately?"

"No, of course not."

"It looks to me as if you were afraid I might come home loaded and spoil things for the kids."

"The thought was never in my mind," said Alice so loyally that I couldn't be sure she was lying.

"When a boy is captain of something and plans a party," I said, "it's human nature for him to run it where he has the say about everything, right where he lives, especially with a set-up like ours."

"Human nature is variable," Alice remarked.

"Don't be that way, please," I said. "This is important. I'm trying to find out."

"There's no mystery," Alice assured me. "George didn't want the party here. That's all."

"Why didn't he want it here?"

"I don't know. Why do you want to make a cosmic problem out of it?"

We talked on for a while but I got no further. It was true I hadn't been drunk for some months but I had been in fairly bad shape a number of times. Alice was too kind to mention this, let alone rub it in. Of course I cannot say even now that George was keeping his friends away from his own house for fear his father would forget and show up in disgraceful condition. That was what I thought and

it is what I think now, but I couldn't ask George and if I had asked him, he wouldn't have said. I was shut out. I am certain he never thought as badly of me as I deserved—always looking at the whole problem from a boy's viewpoint—but he knew there were allowances that had to be made, plans that had to be adjusted because of my failings.

The good side was that basically he was protecting me. He was making sure I would be safe from myself.

I do not ask what his memories are; he would not, he could not tell me this story, though it is really his. But I can tell it, and here I am telling it to him. The object is not to look back but to look ahead, for the roles taken by him and by me long ago may be waiting for others to re-enact. I say to him, let's not bother about any of this except for the sake of understanding.

4. *It Wasn't So Good for Business*

ACCORDING to the old play based upon O. Henry's story, Jimmy Valentine, the safe-cracker, rubbed his fingers with sandpaper to increase their sensitivity and enable them to feel and recognize the slight motion of the tumblers of a safe lock. He needed "raw, bleeding nerves." The way I approached drinking was, after a while, not unlike this old theatrical notion. I needed to get by on nerve. I needed to excite my nervous system, to whip myself into the tone and condition of a highly-strung racehorse.

Are there contradictions here? Of course, but only contradictions that blend easily into the pattern of alcoholism.

I knew then, as I know now, that alcohol was a narcotic rather than a true stimulant—but, I reminded myself wryly, "it stimulates me!" At times, many times, I experienced the anaesthetic effect, sometimes in relief from tension, sometimes in "passing out" or in deep alcoholic slumber. Yet during the working day it was clearly true that liquor could produce a sharper edge, a renewal of attack. I was more keenly aware of the components of any task before me.

I drank socially with clients. I drank with groups in order to mingle advantageously among men of my profession, to enlarge my acquaintance, to be impressed upon the attention of successful executives who might help me. But during working hours I drank as a conditioner.

I couldn't get well started with what I had to do on some particular day unless I took a drink. At first this was the answer to the left-over feeling from nights before, later it was routine. I depended upon that first drink.

Then things didn't go well unless I went out for another. The second drink, say around ten o'clock, was a lifesaver. It stopped me from being jittery (a narcotic effect?), it seemed to make me more alive and effectively tuned (a stimulant, after all?), it gave me greater capacity for work. After a while, I was running out to toss off a neat whisky two or three times a morning during periods when pressure was great.

There was no way to disguise this morning habit, and I began to make it a practice not to see any client until afternoon—liquor on the breath before noon was a give-away. It wasn't good. But cocktails at lunch, and maybe an after-lunch highball, were an expected thing, and a smell of liquor on the breath during the afternoon was perfectly all right.

It was, of course, ordinary common sense not to walk in upon clients or any important business figures in the morning with a whisky breath, but it was also typical alcoholic shrewdness. One of the first effects of continued drinking is likely to be an impairment of judgment; alcohol puts you off-balance, lessens your ability to view and consider the full circle of the horizon. But it makes you sharper and more resourceful within a narrow arc. You can be a pretty foxy fellow. You can dissemble admirably. You can outwit the watchmen around you. And, being so clever and resourceful, how will you admit that the range and nature of your intelligence is narrowed?

Nothing worried me less than any suspicion that my powers were down-graded by alcohol, for my shrewdness was too evident.

The people in my profession knew that I drank, but so did most advertising men, and my reputation did not suffer. A time came when I was hired for a better job in New York, the advertising capital. Nobody could have told me I wasn't getting on.

For a while I was more careful of my drinking; probably the stimulus of working in New York City gave me enough excitement and buoyancy to offset the need for alcohol to a large degree. Some time would pass before the excitement wore off and the new job became as familiar and unrelieved as the old.

Here I had more opportunities to increase my friendships in the

advertising profession, and in business generally, though at the same time I was being reminded of the universal competition. Everyone with ideas to sell, everyone with a tip, a hope, a new angle, everyone with something to say or whisper. Yesterday's achievement an old story, today a pressure to tie in with some new burst of genius or of salesmanship. You had to be in the know, you had to have contacts. You had to think on your feet and outguess the other fellow. You had to be creative. You had to sell yourself. You had to worry. Everybody worried.

Almost everyone drank, as if alcohol were a catalytic agent in the presence of which all the urgent reactions in the ferment of advertising would take place more advantageously. I saw what was going on and I didn't mind. I thought I could do as well as the next fellow. There was only one answer to competition—not to be afraid of it, and to get into it up to your neck. You had to use everything allowed by the rules of the game, and liquor was one of the readiest and easiest and pleasantest of tools.

Advertising, of course, was selling liquor too, identifying it with the gracious and sophisticated life, showing the sort of successful men who used this particular brand, reiterating a story of flavors, bouquets, special formulas, and so on. The use of alcohol was surrounded by special atmosphere. The waiter who brought you a cocktail was more mannered than the waiter who brought you ham and eggs. The accessories of liquor and drinking gleamed in the windows of expensive shops—many varieties of crystal glasses, jiggers and bar spoons and bottle-openers of brightest chrome or silver, complete services of all kinds for the fastidious, convenient home bars. All this was part of the new social sanction that included the use of liquor on all sorts of occasions from weddings and anniversary dinners to ordinary afternoon gatherings and evenings at home.

As New York and I became better acquainted, liquor would help me ride along with the frenzy, and it would help me work out an important project of my own.

I had met a man named Jenney who was advertising manager of a woman's magazine that most people had never heard of. In those

days it wasn't much of a magazine and it didn't carry much advertising. A good guess might have been that the concern responsible for it would either fold or drop the magazine as a bad venture, and in either case Jenney would be out of a job. The result was that he had plenty of time to lunch with me while the success-minded men around us rushed for more valuable contacts.

I was on the make and ready to play any chance. I liked Jenney and I was even able to throw some advertising his way. Then one afternoon while I was having a drink with him, he told me a deal was in the making for the sale of the magazine to an important industrial concern that would change its orientation and raise it to the rank of the real so-called mass media. There was no reason why this should mean anything to me, but one detail stuck in my mind. The production of the magazine would have to be shifted to some new plant, preferably in a different area.

That night I began thinking that maybe I could line up a printing and production proposal for some concern that would pay me an imposing commission. This was the sort of imaginative planning that would earn a man in the advertising and publishing fields a reputation and the beginning of a fortune. It was creative. It was in the groove of the times. I didn't amount to anything in the scale of the profession as a whole, yet I had as good a chance to put something across as anyone else. What you needed was imagination, judgment, the ability to click.

This couldn't be a small deal, and I wouldn't approach it as such. I talked with Jenney again, and although he didn't take my ideas too seriously, he gave me the information I needed. I went to work in my own time, nights and Sundays, and put together a lot of figures and a plan of approach. Then I introduced myself to a man named MacIvor who was in the top bracket of the big league; it wasn't easy to see him, for his time was crowded and he devoted himself to people and things of importance. He was a tall, grim, silver-haired man who looked as if he had been cast for the part by some movie director.

MacIvor had printing and production facilities outside the New York area. He would never have thought of the particular thing I

had in mind, but once I had thought of it, he could see the enormous possibilities. If he reached for it, he might have the contract to produce a monthly magazine with an initial circulation of almost half a million copies and the prospect of a quickly developing increase, and nowhere in the picture was there any doubt as to satisfactory credit. I gave MacIvor my figures.

I don't mean that he was convinced, or that he was easy to convince, but the ground had been laid. Meantime I had kept in touch with Jenney, who agreed to meet MacIvor with me at lunch if I could arrange it. Jenney wouldn't have the final answer, but only one more step would be needed. The wind seemed fair and I couldn't see any real obstacles ahead.

MacIvor agreed to the idea of the luncheon conference, and on the morning of that day I was jubilant. I had lived with the idea, cherished it, taken it home and slept with it, gone over and over all the factors involved and the few possible objections. I had been in a state of nervous tension along with a good deal of recurring fatigue. You can't drive yourself indefinitely without some let-down. All was in the clear now, pending the important meeting, and I needed a drink.

I needed a drink and had one, and another, and the medicine was so potently satisfactory that only one flaw was discoverable—it fell a little short. I had another.

I wish I could say that I failed to appear for the lunchtime conference—that would have been better than what happened. But I did appear, drunk, loud, aggressive. Everything my manner should have been, it was not. Everything I should not have said, I said.

"Listen," I told MacIvor, and at the moment I think I hated his smooth, prosperous face and silvery hair, "this has gone too far for you to freeze me out. Don't forget that."

This may not be exactly what I said but it is near enough.

"So far," he told me, "there's nothing for anyone to be frozen out of."

"Oh, isn't there?" I snapped back. "That's not how it looks to me. I may not be a big shot but I'm on the ball . . ." And so on, drunkenly.

Jenney tried to calm me. We got past that burst of alcoholic over-anxiety and bad temper. But I was mean. I had been repressing my fears to a greater degree than I had realized. I had been forcing myself along a narrow passage that I hadn't really liked, and somehow I had filled myself with resentment. Now the resentment came out.

I swore. I posed absurdly. I called MacIvor by his last name without any "Mister." I talked big. I didn't give MacIvor and Jenney a chance. I was the important guy. They had to listen to me.

By the time the lunch was ended, I was all through. The big deal was off before it was on. I had drunk myself out of the fruits of my imagination and all my careful work and preparation. I could have lived like a prince on the commission I never made.

Later MacIvor did take over the production of the magazine, but by then it was not my deal. Jenney had dropped out, and the negotiations were with someone else.

The alcoholic always misses the boat—and there are more ways than one of missing.

I'll Have Another

The failure of my grand scheme caused me a good deal of wretchedness and Alice suffered from much of it, but I did not blame myself altogether. I made excuses. I never quite explained why or how, but I had been betrayed.

The excitement of New York had become an old story and the answer to my need was alcohol. My regular drinking was systematic and not productive of difficulties anyone would notice, at least so far as I knew, but at intervals I would get really drunk in a big way. Sometimes I would go on a bender that lasted for days.

Often after one of these, I stopped drinking again. In a state of abject misery, depressed, aching, desperate to recover a feeling of well being, I planned to escape the obsession of alcohol. I believed I was escaping. Sober for a while, rid of my physical misery and the sickness of soul that was always involved with it, I would drink only moderately or not at all for a considerable period. The relief

was tremendous at first; then it slipped into the miscellaneous storehouse of the past.

Sooner or later, the same thing happened again, always without a sense of caution or of danger on my part. If I had any real expectation at all, I expected to drink as in years past, moderately and with satisfaction. I expected that everything would be under control, but after the first drink nothing was under control. A man poised for a jump is unlikely to check himself as the jump begins—so it was with that first drink for me. I had begun something which would run through a cycle.

I thought of the danger as lying in the second drink perhaps, or in the third or fourth. I never planned to go so far. I might possibly have a second, but no more. But I was wrong in my assumption, wrong in my approach.

The danger to the alcoholic is in the first drink. He does not want to learn that, of course, and in his refusal to recognize it lies proof that he is an alcoholic.

My worst benders were over weekends, so that they did not interfere too much with my work, though I swindled my employers badly. Often I was not fit for anything until Tuesday and I should have been paid only for a three or four day week. Sometimes I sobered up just enough by day to go through the motions that were expected of me, and used the evening and a good part of the night to catch up on the drinking I had looked forward to all day long.

Alice talked to me many times, seriously, affectingly. If she chose the right moment when I was in a mood of revulsion and penitence, I responded with protestations of agreement. She could say nothing more telling or severe than I said to myself. She knew that I was devoted to my family, that I never intended again to expose them or myself to the folly, shame, and wretched misuse of myself and my resources that had made us all so unhappy in the past. But of course she knew that the time of another innocent first drink would come, and that other drinks would follow as the symptoms of a disease mark its progressive stages.

My older brother wrote to me and talked to me. Friends talked to

me. Alice got me to church. I read articles and books about the nature and treatment of alcoholism.

But the problem for me, as I saw it always and of course wanted to see it, was simply one of drinking normally, of handling my liquor well as so many other men did. That this might be impossible for a man of my intelligence I would never for a moment admit—I never considered that such a dogma could even remotely apply to ME. I was confident that—after a while—I would be taking one or two drinks and enjoying them, and that would be all.

Even when I promised to quit permanently, and meant it, the reservation was present in the back of my mind. Permanently, yes, but with time off for good behavior, probation at the end of a certain period, and then the green fields of normal social drinking.

If a man cannot have faith in his intelligence and his will, what sort of a role can he see himself playing in life? He can recognize that he is powerless against an attack of measles or of the common cold, but these things are not voluntary. The drinking of liquor appears to be entirely voluntary, and for me, indeed it was—but only at times. The compulsion came and went as tides ebb and flow. I didn't even know about the compulsion, since at no time did my conduct seem anything but natural and reasonable. So long as I was capable of reason, everything was fine; all else was the effect of drinking, and usually I could remember nothing much about it.

I knew that other men drank, and I knew that liquor continued to be an aid as well as a grace to men in business and the professions. I believed it was an aid and grace to me in the forming and strengthening of associations, a natural enough view at the outset, as I have shown, but it came to be a curious notion bound up with my narrowing outlook and increasing absorption with alcohol.

An Affair of Honor

There are fine restaurants in the mid-town district, and the restaurants have bars, and at the noon hour, a generous interval stretching from twelve to three, one may meet an engaging lot of successful men having their cocktails at these bars preparatory to a

meal that the cocktails make ceremonial. Someone may speak of the ritual drinking of the American business man. Well, here it is, not only of the business man but of the artist and lawyer and writer as well.

Yet in this instance, at least, "ritual drinking" should not be an invidious phrase. Sometimes there is no habit in it—business men may have such ceremonial lunches only occasionally, and the rest of the time satisfy their needs with sandwiches and coffee. But even where there is habit, the habit may be largely custom, altogether a gracious thing, though with a tinge of the same meaning. To lunch at ease with a cocktail or two for added appetite and preparation is surely a manifestation of the good life. Why should we be grim and stark and hasty?

As in so many relationships of alcohol, the use of one set of words makes a custom seem dubious or even reprehensible, and the use of another set of words makes it seem admirable. All the time there is an objective truth if our minds are free enough to distinguish it. The truth we seek to find for ourselves, in application to our own conduct, is not permitted to be objective.

The extension of the so-called lunch hour to three o'clock makes it possible for much pleasant and useful talk to be exchanged, for the transaction of business, the approval or disapproval of ideas and hopes, the softening up of prospects, the cementing of reputations and relationships, and so on.

I was one of this ceremonial company. To be one of their enviable number, I did as they did—though not always.

One noon I stood at a bar which opened into a large business men's restaurant on the street floor of one of the imposing mid-town buildings. The decor, I should judge, was adapted from the France of long ago, but the service and accessories were modern American. I had nothing particularly on my mind. I was simply being sociable, or sociably on the make. In more or less rapid succession I talked with a number of acquaintances, drank with them, watched them as they drifted off, for I was in no hurry to begin my meal. To drink and talk and laugh in this company—that was an aim in itself. The surroundings pleased me.

Presently I would go in to lunch, but meantime one more Martini. Everything was happy and under control. How many Martinis I drank I cannot remember, not more than on other occasions, and not enough to suggest a need for caution.

Then I heard a strange voice behind me and almost in my ear, unpleasantly loud and unpleasantly close: "Your brother is a fat-headed son of a bitch."

I was incredulous. I turned, looked up into the face of a big, grinning fellow I had never seen before, and demanded, "What did you say?"

He had said just what I thought I had heard him say. He said it again, still grinning. He looked prosperous, a college bred type, and he was probably more at home in these surroundings than I was. I didn't consider anything about him at that moment, though. I put my glass down on the bar and drove my right hand into his chin with all the strength I could make it carry. He didn't go all the way down, and from that instant I was swinging and punching while the men around tried to hold and subdue me.

I fought and cursed and yelled foul epithets. I was the central figure in a brawl that was loud and lively while it lasted, and I don't remember who hustled me out at last, or how long it was before I was being taken to a district police station with the noises of bell and siren that mean a fire, an accident, or one more drunk.

They let me cool off for a little while at the station, then I was questioned. I had to tell them who I was, where I worked, where I lived.

"What started this, now? What were you trying to do?" The officer asked me. I took him for a sergeant. I had never seen the inside of a New York police station before. It was pretty bleak and alien, like an Ellis Island for a citizen, with old, worn oak railings and benches, dim windows, a smell of tobacco and disinfectant.

"The Big Boy called my brother a fat-headed son of a bitch," I said, and I imagine I said it sullenly. A lot of things I did not remember, but I remembered that.

"Oh, did he?" said the sergeant. "And you tried to lambaste him, is that it?"

"Nobody can say that to me about my brother."

"All right, all right. Can you remember having something to drink?"

"Sure I had something to drink."

"Oh, you did?"

"Sure. A couple of Martinis."

"A couple."

"Well, I wasn't drunk."

"That's what you were," said the sergeant, "and I'm going to send you home and you're going to sober up and behave yourself. Now, then."

He said I was drunk but I didn't believe him. Somebody called a taxi and started me off in it, but we hadn't gone three blocks before I saw the taxi driver looking at me over his shoulder. I didn't like the expression in his face.

"Who are you staring at?" I asked him.

"Be yourself, Buddy," the driver told me.

"I don't have to take anything from you," I said, with the adornment and emphasis of profanity and obscenity thrown in.

"Are you going to be quiet, you stupid rummy?" the driver wanted to know.

"Am I going to be quiet? Why the hell should I be quiet? And who licensed you to call me a stupid rummy?"

There I was, starting another fight in the cab, and in about three minutes flat the driver had me back at the police station and the sergeant was giving me a withering eye. I wouldn't have minded swinging at him. Resentment and anger, still fueled by too many Martinis, stirred me at the expense of all else.

Even now I wasn't arrested. I was put on a bench under a tall, dim window, in the close, smelly air, to wait for a while. Then a friend of mine from the office who had been in the bar at the time, a man named Johnson, took me to Pennsylvania Station and went in the train to Jersey with me.

By the time I got home I was sober and penitent. It was tough to tell Alice what had happened, except that my resentment helped a good deal. After all, the initial insult was a measure of justifica-

tion. Anyone would have wanted to do what I had done. The next day I found out that the Big Boy was an old and good friend of my brother. If I had given him a chance, he would have begun laughing, shaken my hand, and introduced himself.

Someone had suggested that he pretend to be what he wasn't, using that approach to stir me up. If I hadn't had too many Martinis, the joke might have succeeded. Surely I would have seen the good nature in his face and suspected a note of banter in the mock-aggressive words. The joke was a poor one, but so was my judgment. Liquor is bad for the judgment.

Passage of Time

Drinking uses up time. It is hard to explain how weeks and months and years could be added on end without any great moment of decision, how alcoholism settles into familiarity and runs with the calendar. It had become a part of my life, but because so much of my life was lived with a semblance of reasonableness, it was for the most part a silent force. You get along with alcoholism when it is quiescent, you are alarmed when it shows itself in crisis or emergency, you do nothing about it because somehow the emergency is soon over until the next time. And, also, you do nothing about it because there appears nothing that can be done without great unpleasantness.

I suffered what I considered an undue and disproportionate disgrace because of the incident of the mid-town bar and my visits to the police station. The whole affair was unfortunate but surely open to explanation and sympathetic understanding; so I thought, but everyone who knew what had happened was obviously viewing me as a drunk and a rowdy character. Nobody bothered to make distinctions. Everything I did was of one piece, added to the cumulative burden my reputation had to carry.

On the other hand, though I was now a man given to drinking, with a record of drunkenness in public places, capable of violent assault and perhaps worse, I was still intelligent, head of a family everyone respected and liked, and reasonably successful in a job my drinking had not yet caused me to lose. Judged by my reputa-

tion, I should have been dealt with forthwith for my own sake, that of my family and society at large. Judged by these other factors, I was not only tolerated but even indulged in pursuit of the way I had chosen. It is not alone in alcoholism that inconsistencies lie.

The same sort of contradiction followed me in all the relationships of my job. It was known that I drank—how could I expect otherwise, though I was crafty about time and place and quantity, and though it seemed to me that a relatively long period of approximate sobriety should compensate for the next plunge off the deep end? I suppose it was said about me by my own friends, clients, and acquaintances, “Pete’s hitting it pretty hard. Why doesn’t he ease up?”

I could tell when things such as this were being said, by whom, and with what emphasis. At least, I thought I could, and I would make a show of easing up.

He’s hitting it hard, but he isn’t out of the running yet. A lot of men hit it hard at times, yet they do good work and rise to better jobs.

Sometimes when I was absorbed in an important project I kept my drinking down, or perhaps it kept itself down. One of the most promising stretches of work I ever did was on an advertising campaign that represented an enormous amount of money immediately and perhaps even more in subsequent periods. The chance was mine because I had worked with the client when he was small, and now he was large—very large.

I applied myself diligently. I drank more or less but I didn’t get drunk. I didn’t need to. I handled myself well at conferences, surmounted the early difficulties, and at last had an agreement ready for signature. In order to prepare the final draft, I had borrowed some important and private documents from the client. They were in my briefcase and the draft was in my briefcase, and I set out one golden spring day to meet Walter R. Stevenson in his pine-paneled office and bring the whole long labor to completion. All was over but the shouting.

I felt fine. I had been sober for a long time, I was still sober, and I intended to stay sober. There was no reason for me to take a

drink. I had no craving. My one interest was in the business appointment with Mr. Stevenson.

A little ahead of time I waited in his office. The black-haired receptionist took in my name and returned after a while to say that Mr. Stevenson had some emergency long-distance calls to make and would like to postpone our meeting until afternoon. Would three o'clock be all right?

Three o'clock would be perfectly convenient. My day was set aside for this important piece of business, and nothing else could interfere. I went down in the elevator, carrying my briefcase, feeling as free and airy as the current of wind eddying from the Battery and the Bay. There was no convenient way to kill time around the downtown district, but I walked as far as City Hall and sat on a bench watching the pigeons and passers-by. Then I decided to run up to Forty-Second Street and have lunch in one of my favorite places in that neighborhood.

I took the subway, and I can remember that the car was not crowded. The trip occupied only a short while, and there I was in the great empire of mid-town, feeling tranquil, important, and even a little gay. I walked a block or two and entered one of the big hotels. I found myself turning into the bar, but that was appropriate, for the restaurant I had chosen was just beyond.

Without premeditation, quite casually, I stepped up to the bar and ordered a Martini. I had no feeling that any caution was indicated, no sense of danger. If anyone had asked me, I would very likely have said that the day and the prospective success of my mission indicated a cocktail and its flattery of the spirits. Indeed, why not?

A stranger, standing at the bar a short distance away, was also sipping a Martini. He smiled and came toward me. I didn't know him, but he was the sort of friendly stranger one would drink with. We began talking, about the fact that we were both alone, about the weather, about politics. I remember the second cocktail but not the third; somewhere here the curtain closed down.

My life went on. I said things and did things, but I have no memory of any of them.

During my next moment of consciousness I discovered a plain moist table before me. I was leaning on it. There was a bothersome noise of traffic from outside. That I was in a cheap bar somewhere or other was evident but it took me a little while to realize that I was now on Third Avenue and the time was three in the morning. I felt rocky, but physical sensations of discomfort were nothing as against the anxiety that swept over me. My briefcase was gone. The bartender said I hadn't had a briefcase when I arrived.

Gone—my client's confidential papers. Long past, the time of my appointment with Mr. Stevenson. Of course I thought of Alice too; I had promised her that I would be home early and we were to have gone out for the evening in a spirit of celebration.

There were telephone booths in that Third Avenue bar, but I did not call anyone up. I felt in my pockets and found that I still had some money, so I ordered a whisky and drank it.

I tried to face failure, breach of confidence, a disgrace worse than any of the others. All that had happened seemed irrevocable, a blank, terrible, overwhelming wall of stone. How miserable can a man feel? It seemed to me that this was the very bottom of the pit.

I never did make any telephone call, but at last that morning I went home. I hadn't planned it that way, but I was glad at least that the boys had left for school.

Two days later a Forty-Second Street florist telephoned and asked if I had left a briefcase at his place of business. He said a man had stepped in and asked if he could leave a briefcase for an hour or so for safe-keeping, and since he had not returned, the florist had opened it and found my name and address. I still had no remote memory of this act of precaution, and it cleared matters little so far as my behavior was concerned. All the other links were forever lost.

I found all the papers intact, and this much was salvaged. But as it turned out, amazingly, the advertising contract was salvaged too. The alcoholic lapses that can be covered up are sometimes past all belief—a story of illness, some combination of favoring circumstances, the fact that the eyes of the men and women involved are directed elsewhere and that these men and women do not expect

alcoholic behavior and are ready to interpret events in a more normal scale of reference. All these factors helped me, but in another sense I was past help.

My job was safe, my name was as secure as before, but I had suffered an irremediable disaster in my own mind and emotions, and in relation to my family.

Oddly, I had never before suspected myself of being a periodic drunkard. I was familiar with the details of my alcoholic life but not with the pattern, not with the long-range meaning. Now I reacted to the near-disaster as one reacts to physical and emotional shock. I was shaken as never before and, cold sober, I suffered torments. I was desperately sick of myself. I wanted to be different.

Here was an occasion for the exercise of determination, that will-power kept in reserve, the bulldozer that could be called in to fix everything. "I can stop drinking if I want to." Now I wanted to. I wanted to more than I had ever wanted anything before in my life—at least, I thought I did.

The Devil Was Well

I did not drink for a considerable time. I forgot or suppressed the revelation that I might be (after all, it was never certain in my own mind) what is known as a periodic, a drinker who goes back to the bottle as certainly as a homing pigeon to its loft. I began to feel well, at least physically.

You don't keep pushing against something when there is really nothing there to push. You don't put forth effort when obviously no effort is required. So it was with my dramatic resolution to exert my willpower: at first I derived some satisfaction from rolling the bulldozer along the ramparts and observing that all was clear. But I wasn't even tempted to drink, and the parade of needless force seemed foolish. After a while I forgot about it.

I assumed that a drinkless state was going to be natural to me, for a long, long time, if not forever. I had learned my lesson.

But the time came, and I now have no distinct recollection of just when it was, that I craved a drink. The physical sickness and misery were long gone. At first I wanted a drink without really being aware

of the craving, I wanted to be let off the hard driver's seat of my job. I wasn't sleeping well. I was restless.

"How did things go at the office?" Alice asked.

"It's a rat race," I said.

She looked at me with that secret, observing quality in her gaze. She looked at me often that way.

"A rat race," I said. "But don't worry. I'm not going out and get pickled."

"I didn't think you were."

"You looked at me that way," I told her.

Alice didn't understand—so I had often told myself. She had her feminine intuition about many things, but she couldn't know what went on inside a man. I resented the responsibility and authority that had, through the years, passed from me to her because of alcohol. I couldn't be whittled down any more. Just because of what was past, she had no right to expect that the future was going to be the same . . .

"Don't worry," I said. "I'll be home early."

I was home early.

Alice watched me and I knew she was watching me. Certainly she was justified, and I couldn't deny that, but a man doesn't want to be watched all the time. And when I had said the job was a rat race, I had meant just that.

There were words that you used, and everyone knew what they meant. A lot of city people never had seen the wire spring from a bale of hay when it was cut, but they said themselves that things had "gone haywire" and the expression was commoner than most phrases deriving from their own experience. A "rat race" was not a competition between rats in a cage, but it was the way we lived and worked and tore ourselves to pieces with haste, anxiety, frustration, and uncompleted tasks or effort that fell short always and had to be renewed. Our personal affairs and our civilization were a rat race, and every day things went haywire.

I wanted a drink but I did not take one. There were plenty of chances but I just didn't. I wouldn't.

When I wanted to and didn't, I felt unsatisfied but reassured.

The old willpower was working. Yet why should I keep myself forever away from the satisfaction of a single drink? It wasn't the use of alcohol that was bad, it was the abuse. I had abused it and had suffered and had come out a wiser man.

But one drink—why wasn't I entitled to it after so long? As a boy and as a younger man I had begun drinking at will and stopped at will, and wasn't that the real function of willpower?

Still I didn't take the drink.

Not for a day after that thought crossed my mind, or two days, or three days. But the next week I did. Then it seemed that I had been anticipating that drink for a long time, as if it were a Miltonian "far off divine event" toward which my destiny moved. Not consciously but deep inside I had waited and looked forward and shaped the expectancy of all my body cells for the alcohol that was coming.

The drink was like arriving home after a long and difficult journey at sea or in desert country. It was like the completion of a rhyme. It was like an appointment kept suddenly after the opening of sealed orders. Alice had known about the orders but I had kept them sealed from myself.

The first drink, however, was incomplete as it always has been and always will be for an alcoholic.

When you start something, it isn't always desire that is the important factor. You can get along, and often do, with too little sleep and partial satisfaction of hunger. You break off a pleasant social talk in order to get to work on time. But the first drink is a process begun and not finished. It lacks the completion that is somehow as inevitable as the progression of a chemical reaction in nature.

I took that first drink after leaving the office half an hour early in the afternoon. Without explaining the matter to myself, I had even allowed in advance for the extra time.

At nine o'clock, in a high state of intoxication, I engaged a room in a small hotel because it wasn't possible to go home that night. I tried to get Alice by telephone but she didn't answer. She didn't need to hear from me—she already knew. She had called my office to find out when I left, and the rest was perfectly clear. She

had stayed alone often enough because of my drunkenness, but this time she hadn't wanted to, so she had taken the boys and gone to a friend's house for the night. What had she told the boys? They may remember, as they read these lines. I guess she hadn't had to explain much. They knew as well as she.

I did not go home until the third day.

It wasn't the same story. It never was quite the same, for although the basic circumstances were present—the sickness of body and spirit, the unbearable racking and torment of nerves, the self-reproach—there was always something new. This time the new and bitter element was the realization—why had I not grasped it before?—that Alice would never again place real confidence or dependence in or upon me.

I was marked. I had marked myself. Now she could not even pretend convincingly to believe my protestations.

"I know you mean what you say," she told me after the crisis was over, "but you can't help yourself."

"I can't help myself?"

"No."

Implausible as this may seem, the idea was a new one to me. I was hurt and disturbed that Alice should believe it. The fact that she did believe it made it something to be reckoned with, almost as if it were true. But it couldn't be true . . . and then I ran through the old familiar routine. I am, after all, an intelligent man. I am perfectly capable of regulating my own conduct.

Alice might have said, though she didn't, "*Intelligence has nothing to do with it.*"

Willpower has nothing to do with it.

To come to this conclusion earlier is one of the important challenges for those around an alcoholic as for an alcoholic himself. The act of drinking, which seems voluntary and for so many men and women is voluntary, becomes quite otherwise for the alcoholic. It is compulsive. One might well say, "The poor guy can't help it."

Drinking originates in forces as beyond conscious control, though different in kind, as the symptoms of scarlet fever.

It is a gift of the human mind to be able to learn by experience;

but there are hidden drives behind many actions, and these hidden drives are not taught by experience or anything else. In one sense the alcoholic is aware of the lessons to be drawn from his life, but at the same time there are strange and sometimes fantastic forces that bid him ignore or deny what should be obvious. He is under this inner compulsion to go on repeating a cycle he can change only if he himself is changed.

Ben Jonson wrote of "the wild anarchy of drink," and so far as the human will and intelligence are concerned it is, for the alcoholic, the wildest of anarchies. Yet beyond his will it follows a familiar routine like the typical fever chart of an illness.

Thus come about the almost endless repetitions in an ever-descending course. Thus I found the repetitions in my own alcoholic life, and that is why I make record of them here.

Repetition is the essence of alcoholism. The expectation of reform or improvement, in the absence of some major change in the alcoholic's personality, is unlikely. Ordinary rules don't apply. The matter is almost always beyond reasoning.

It happens. It will happen again.

Over and over, under circumstances essentially the same though outwardly different, I made my protestations, denials, and assurances to Alice. At the times I made them, they were true. My penitence, self-accusation, and firm determination to free myself from alcohol were all real. Yet often I did have some reservations or at least awareness of extenuating circumstances that I knew it would be impossible to communicate to any other person, even to Alice. No one, outside this identical experience, can understand the quality and nature of the ordeal an alcoholic undergoes.

Alice was sympathetic. She wanted to understand. But words do not communicate the nature of a man's maladjustment and need when the very routine of life and work has become a discipline, the nerves jangle and shriek, the flesh and blood rebel. There is no adequate analogy. And to understand how these frictions, tensions, and clashes prevail over the rational behavior so natural to other human beings is harder when the break to alcohol seems to occur some-

times so suddenly, without resistance or warning. The pattern is not plain under observation, or it has twists and deviations.

Off to the Country

I came home one afternoon and found my older brother in earnest conversation with Alice. He acted queerly as if he had been caught at something—the reason was that he and Alice, not for the first time, were discussing my future.

"It's no use, Pete," he said defensively to me, "you can't go on this way."

"I haven't had a drink for six weeks," I said.

This was a lie, but I didn't mean to lie. Where drinking was concerned, deception had become automatic. Whenever a conversation touched on alcohol, I turned furtive and scurrying like some small animal trying to keep out of sight. I think I hadn't had a drink for half that time, but at the very moment there were pint bottles of whisky concealed in several places about the premises because a weekend was coming up and I could not bear to be caught over the weekend without access to alcohol.

"That's all right," my brother said. "We know you've been doing pretty well, but the point is you'd better get the hell out of this rat race while there's still time."

"You know you hate New York," Alice said.

Certainly I had said that. Yes, I did hate New York, though at times the first excitement would come flooding back. Anyway, New York was a good place to get drunk in—the last thing to speak of now.

"Well, maybe you'll tell me what my plans are," I began.

"Don't be like that," said Alice.

"You're way, way out on a limb," said my brother, "and we want to help you get back."

The idea was for Alice and me to pull up stakes, leave New York, and go to the country where her family owned some old farm land that had been used mostly as a summer vacation spot. I was to settle down and become a farmer, a country gentleman.

"Well, why not?" my brother demanded. "It makes sense."

The idea was Alice's. She had called him in to help explain and persuade. Oddly enough, I recognized the judgment that loomed behind theirs, the judgment of circumstance. After all, was this not simply the inevitable stage reached by a drunkard who is not wholly abandoned by friends and family?

"The simple life!" I said, and laughed because it did seem funny.

"Listen, Pete," said my brother. "Answer this truthfully—do you like your job?"

I would have expected to say "Yes" without hesitation, but, surprisingly, I experienced a moment of insight that was more than a flash—it seemed a long vista across the whole period of my professional career.

"No," I said, "I hate my job."

As I saw it now, it was all a brittle, bloodless affair between me and myself. I had met many people, worked with a lot of people, accounted myself a good mixer and a good fellow, but I had become more and more lonely. I was more and more introspective and morose. The things I did seemed fine and grand for a little while, but they weren't real—not to me. They were a game in my own mind. I built myself up and tore myself down.

"It's a rat race," I said, overlooking the fact that my brother had already said that. But what I meant by the phrase now was deeper and more far-reaching than any realization of mine had gone before.

For all my running around, planning, getting tuned up, getting let down, flashing on from this sweet idea to that sweeter one, for all my frantic activity among the millions of the greatest city of the earth, I was empty, unhappy, and alone.

"You can get acquainted with your family again," said my brother.

I recovered from my anger and resentment. We talked dollars and cents and how I could make a living in the country—it wasn't the country exactly, for we'd be on the rim of a modern small town. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed possible that the

change would work—change! That was it. Change that did not have to be found surreptitiously in a glass or a bottle, a break in the discipline, the bare, stark discipline known as city life that led time and time again to the need for alcoholic release.

One of the things I liked least about it was hearing Alice explain to the boys why they had to be taken out of their schools and why we had to leave everything to which we—and of course particularly the boys—had become accustomed. In an aside to George now I should like to say how sorry I was, and still am, for the ruin of his school baseball prospects. Alice made a good story of it, but George's expression was particularly questioning, as if he knew the whole thing had not been brought into the open. Both he and Gussie knew it all had something to do with me, and probably in their hearts they understood the truth—but not the whole truth I am trying to make clear to them now.

I examined myself in a mirror and decided that I looked like a rummy. I was thinner than I had been a few years ago. I had that through-the-gin-mill trademark in the lines of my face and a distinguishable cast of complexion that I didn't like.

"It's about time I moved to the country," I said to myself.

When we moved out, I gave away the pints of whisky I had concealed to the handyman and the movers. I was heading into the freshening wind, and without a backward glance. I would now become, in the words of Thoreau, one of those "alert and healthy natures" that "remember the sun rose clear." Since it rose clear once, it would rise clear another day, and for me.

We established ourselves, as my sons well remember, in an old farmhouse overlooking a broad area of fields that, if not encouragingly fertile, could be made so through the application of intelligence and energy. The country surrounded us, yet we had all of what are known as the modern conveniences. We were aware of the invitation to health and a simpler happiness than modern civilization usually affords.

I was not left to become a twentieth-century pioneer. There was a competent farmer down the road who wanted to work with me. He knew the land, the methods, the seasons, the pests. He knew the

time and the way of everything. My promotional mind ran toward the development of marketing. Our enterprise would be on the order of super-engineered market gardening with quality as the catch phrase.

I will say at once that it didn't work too well, but we soon began turning some of our buildings into accommodations for vacationers from the city, and that branch of the business worked very well indeed. We made a living and kept on the up-grade. We were, without a doubt, better off than we had been while I had my job in New York, though with less cash income. One thing was definitely gone: the glamour, nebulous but ineradicable of a city future. The spirit of New York is on the make, it lifts even the most jaded, it promises big and bigger things tomorrow, an unfolding of fortune next year or the year after. You inhale a special elixir. You drink from a fountain that never will run dry.

But the promise of the simple life is—more simple life. The horizon, grand arc as it is, remains in one place; for change you look to the prospect of the seasons, sometimes not without impatience, especially if you have a fluid temperament. Simplicity may not forever be its own reward.

To be direct about the matter, I soon found things to resent, though at first I disguised them or the feeling from myself and from Alice. In these new surroundings, the resentment was the same old emotion. I had fancied that it was New York and its exactions that had wound me up with straining tensions, but the obstinacy of a tractor or the tedium of overcoming weeds could produce the same effect. Had I hated discipline? Here it was in a new form but as imperious as ever, for I could not leave a tractor in the field and walk away for the afternoon, the day, or forever, and I could not leave the weeds to grow. The work I did was no great contribution to the labor of the world, but it was necessary; I had to keep my end up. Discipline—how ironic the word is!

Turn it one way and you have a thing of merit, a virtue, a regimen toward which all should aspire. Turn it another way and you have bondage, the sort of slavery that sets you dreaming night

and day of all sorts of possibilities of escape. Yet always, to a greater degree than we like to admit, it is the same thing seen from different points of view. And the point of view is determined for the most part by the matter of who and what imposes the discipline—a wife, the law, custom, an end to be gained, the free choice of reason.

The discipline with which I lived was not of my making, yet it was not open to a single rational objection that I could think of. I had to combine my resentment with outward acceptance and suppressed frustration. Yet the whole plan was obviously wise. My life was now uncomplicated, with all its terms and relationships open to my own observation and understanding. Failure and success, success and failure, seemed to be going hand in hand. Perhaps after a few more months, another year . . .

I had gone to the postoffice for the mail. The month was October and twilight had settled in over the land and the town. In a recess between the postoffice and the next building, three men were standing in the shadow; one of them, I saw, had just had a drink out of a bottle. He was a friend of mine.

"Fellow needs a little inside warming this time of year," he observed to me. I think he was somewhat shamefaced at having me, a man from the city, seeing him drinking out of a bottle in such a public place. The story of my own drinking was not known.

"Sure," I said, "Sure."

"Why don't you give Pete a chance at your liquor?" suggested one of the others.

Hesitantly, as if he feared a refusal from me that would be a sign of my superiority and his inferiority, my friend held out the bottle. I took it and drank.

Sometime the next morning, probably soon after sunrise, someone—I don't know who—deposited my drunken and unconscious body in our barn. The farmer found me there and called Alice.

The lesson was a harsh one. We had learned that alcoholism is not a question of fresh scenes. *Drinking is not determined by the geographical location of the drinker. Place does not in itself make*

a difference. Nor is there any simple life unless it has been achieved in the inner life of the individual who has become an alcoholic.

The Watch Resumed

But of course we did not accept the lesson when it was first presented to us. There were reasons why I had taken this drink of whisky offered to me by a friend in the alley beside the post-office—an impromptu affair if there ever was one—and the reasons would not recur. Everything was still going to be different. So I persuaded Alice, but she began watching me again and I knew the old combination of insecurity for her, guilt, penitence, and resentment for me.

How far is it possible for reasonable human beings to be from the plainest of life's facts? Very far indeed, where alcoholism is concerned!

The pattern that had seemed strictly a city pattern was now becoming a country pattern. The familiar repetition of the periodic drinker set in, always adorned with unique circumstances that made each recurrence highly exceptional and proved logically that the most recent alcoholic orgy had no relation to past or future. So I protested, all the time possessing the knowledge, though keeping it hidden, that alcohol was increasingly identified with my life—to such a degree that I must feel a dread or an abject terror of facing endless tomorrows without it.

I assured Alice and I assured myself, as so many times before, that I *wanted* to have done with drinking entirely and forever. Yet this difficult business of *wanting*—which had so often been kept waiting for a better time or combination of circumstances—was now surrounded by new complications, besetting fears and dreads. Afraid to desperation of being confronted with years in which I could have no alcoholic liquor, in terror of losing the illusion, deeper and fonder than a hope, that I could somehow again possess the grace of alcohol without its penalties, how could it truly be said that I *wanted* to stop drinking?

What I really wanted was clear enough. I wanted to be decent and self-controlled. I wanted Alice's respect and pride, the respect

and pride of my sons as well, but I did not really want to stop drinking. I wanted a state of balance, so long lost, in which I could be all this and have all this—and drink happily and moderately into the bargain.

There is no law against desiring irreconcilables. It is in the nature of man's imagination to reach for all attractive things, to override obstacles, to admit no impossibilities. Balked by facts, he may retreat up the inclined plane of fantasy and hide there in its secret loft, cherishing deceits of his own making and sometimes seeking to project them upon a mercilessly objective world.

The Tractor Salesman

We had been living in the country three or four years when Ben Whalen, salesman for a tractor company, stopped to see me. He came in the morning when Alice was in town, shopping and talking with friends. I liked Ben. He made me think of Frank Sulmet, the guy who seemed weather-proof against drink, able to rally after a night with liquor for a day of something like work. On this fateful morning, Ben wasn't feeling well, and I suspected the reason.

We talked about weather and farming and prospects for a few polite minutes, after which he leaned his red, creased, worn, and heavy head upon his hands. "I feel terrible," he told me. "I was going it on the train last night with a party of the damndest drinkers you ever saw."

"I've seen some," I said.

"I expect so, but I doubt if you ever saw any like these."

"You want some bicarbonate of soda or milk of magnesia or something?" I asked him.

"I feel terrible," he said. "No, I don't want any of that stuff. In a pinch I could do with a bromo, but the thing I really need for my condition is a slight swallow of whisky."

"You don't think I've got it, but I have," I said. I had two bottles hidden in the barn. They were for my own use and I had been counting on them, sometimes day and night, but I didn't begrudge a drink or two for Ben Whalen while he was in this condition.

He drank, closed his eyes, shook his head, and I could see him gradually come alive again. I knew exactly how he felt and how badly he had needed a drink. He held the bottle up toward me, questioningly. I took it. I could work better if I had just a bracer to lead into the day.

"You got a good set-up here," Ben said. "I envy you. If I had any sense I'd do what you've done."

"Right!" I said.

"Boy," he said, "you're lucky."

"I know I'm lucky," I said. "Have another drink?"

"If you will. There's nothing like the stuff itself to bring a man around."

"I'll have a little," I said. "It's all right when you control what you take. The lack of control is where the trouble comes in."

"You know any other little farms around here for sale?" he asked me.

"You don't know when you're well off," I told him.

"Wait a minute," he said. "You're ahead of me. I don't get it."

Our farmer looked in the door then and I snapped at him, "Well, what do you want?"

"Nothing," he said, and went away.

"That son of a bitch annoys me," I said. "He's always trying to make me feel that the little carrots and turnipses and so on are perishing for personal attention from me."

"Is that so?" said Ben.

"Yes, that's so, and some day I'm going to double him up and drop him into the cistern."

I had begun to drink without counting, without noticing. A pleasant excitement had succeeded the drab feeling of one more day.

I cannot vouch for every detail of my conversation with Ben Whalen, but this was substantially the way it went. We began with his congratulation and envy of me for my luck in enjoying country life, and with my lip service to this familiar notion of the pastoral rewards. But as soon as the alcohol took hold, I slipped out of the role I was supposed to be playing and let my resentment show

through. There was no difference between city and country resentment. It was all the same thing.

By the time Alice came home, Ben had left. He was a hard drinker but I do not think he was an alcoholic or he would never have made his train. He made it without any help from me.

Alice found me throwing the contents of the barn tool room through a window into the road, yelling and cursing while the performance went on. I didn't see her the first time she came, but the second time she had a doctor and our farmer with her. They closed in.

The doctor gave me a hypodermic injection to quiet me and in a little while I was on my way to a private sanitarium for alcoholics.

Sanitarium

I was deeply aggrieved that Alice should do this to me. After all, I thought, I had been behaving pretty well. I hadn't, but this was what I thought. My outburst had been one of those chance things—a tractor salesman with a hangover, a few drinks—it didn't mean anything.

As for the doctor, I hated him. He should have known better. They were railroading me, that was it. I was suffering from persecution and injustice. Nevertheless I went to the sanitarium under force and compulsion, in one of the blackest moods I had ever known, the victim of what I saw as injustice and outrage.

Presently all my bitterness was brought into focus against the doctor at the sanitarium whose personality I detested and whose assumption that he knew everything about me was offensive. I was imprisoned, subjugated, disciplined. The control of my life was, for the first time, taken from me—forcibly. I, an intelligent, normal, responsible man of mature years and experience was shut up in a sort of country club surrounded with trees and lawns, also walled and provided with gates, and made to serve as a set-up for a doctor whose characteristics I could mimic and satirize with grim and accurate humor.

What was to be done? Nothing. That was the utmost in humilia-

tion and frustration. I had to follow the rules, continue as an unwilling and unreconciled actor until the end. It wasn't jail but in a way it was worse than jail. It was total confinement for the sensibilities, especially pride, and for the personality that the first principle of manhood requires to be free.

At the sanitarium, as it happened, I met a distinguished poet. His trouble, like mine, must have started long ago, but its immediate occasion had been an assignment in Hollywood where, to give him fortitude against the tensions and exactions of the Hollywood method of work, he had been provided with a supply of seconal tablets. These, with liquor and Hollywood itself, had made him eligible for sanitarium treatment but, like me, he had come unwillingly.

He was lonely without his dog. He and I also agreed that we should have a pint to taper off on. In a little while we were speculating as to whether the two deficiencies might be made interacting.

"I wouldn't have a chance," I said, "but you're a big shot."

He laughed at that but was pleased enough at the compliment.

"Sure," I told him. "You're a big shot. They'll let you out to get your dog, and you can smuggle a pint back in when you come."

It was true enough that they would let him out on the errand of innocence to get his dog, and he started back with the pint; but you can't beat the sanitarium system. He was caught as if he had been a small boy instead of a big shot, and neither he nor I had anything to taper off on.

Except our black thoughts.

Physically there may have been a curative value in the stay I made at the sanitarium, a restorative value at any rate. I drank no alcoholic liquor, I subsisted on a medically sound diet, I was toned up with rest and therapeutic surroundings. But I was not reconstructed.

It may be thought that the risk of another such experience should have served as a deterrent, but the alcoholic does not know the meaning of the word. If his love of family, pride, intelligence, the suffering of drunkenness and ensuing hangovers, the thought of his

security and his health, do not deter him from drinking, a stay in a sanitarium is not likely to be effective.

To George and Gussie

I was glad then and I am glad now that George and Gussie—who was about to leave that childhood nickname behind—were at boarding school or away on visits when most of these events of our country life occurred. In some respects these are the pages it is most difficult for me to write with truth and frankness.

I ask them both to consider my story with clearsighted intelligence, and to realize that my purpose is not only to write of things that happened, but of things that need not have happened, and of things that need not happen to them or to others. The past is not for tears or mourning but for wisdom and strength to use in the future.

5. "I Like It Too Well to Fool with It"

WHAT would I have been if I had not become an alcoholic with my alcoholism determining everything else?

The best answer, in fact the only answer, must be found in tracing, as nearly as that is possible, the changes drinking brought about in my character and personality, in my attitudes, hopes, despairs, and in the relationships that were important to me.

First of all, I experimented with alcoholic liquor; then I liked it and its effects; then I liked it less, and eventually did not enjoy it at all, but looked forward to effects of an elusive, important sort, deep-buried, liberating, desperately-sought, as if I could come close and closer to the unattainable only through alcohol. If the unattainable was still beyond, nevertheless all that was attainable I had to have.

What was I seeking?

Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote long ago: "In the bottle discontent seeks for comfort, cowardice for courage, and bashfulness for confidence." These words, obviously true ones, are quoted in the book *Alcohol Explored* by Haggard and Jellinek, one of a series of works bearing the name of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. (Dr. Jellinek will be referred to again later.) Thus, too, loneliness seeks company, impotence seeks power, negligibility seeks grandeur, uncertainty seeks confidence, defeat seeks redress. Almost endlessly, the human being is tempted to use alcohol to make himself what he wants to be and is not, to give himself the satisfactions he does not possess, to redress some lack of balance

between himself and the world or between himself and his aspirations.

I ask myself what cravings moved me decisively, and still I cannot answer in specific terms. I do know that one of the recognized effects of alcohol is to increase the sense of self-esteem. Oddly enough, one likes himself better a little drunk than he likes himself sober. Other people may like him better, too.

I find this true by the test of experience, and I find it confirmed in books. Dr. George H. Preston in a short, popularly-written book called *Psychiatry for the Curious*, puts the matter in these words: "No deep scientific investigation is necessary to prove that alcohol acts directly on the relations between people . . . Everyone at the party is sure that he is wittier and better liked and at the same time feels that the rest of the party is a little less critical after the second drink. It is this 'Drowning Out' of criticism and particularly of self-criticism that makes alcohol so very important to many people."

With this beginning, it is easy to seek through alcohol not always one thing, but different things at different times, always concerned with the central drive to become something one is not when cold sober. What man alive does not want more wit, more warmth of friendship, more assurance, greater imaginativeness, more confidence and sensitiveness, greater intensity in life and work?

Alcohol is a cheat but it never fails of its promises; repeated disappointments fail to expose the fraud—the next promise is as bright and attractive as the last.

The great irony is to drink for the sake of social adjustment and to become lonely; to drink for pleasant effects and to have liquor become a hateful necessity; to drink for the enlargement and fulfillment of the personality, and to have the personality shrink and turn in upon itself; to drink for better balance with reality and to find reality hidden by mirage. And the final twist of the irony is to see others, who drink moderately, apparently attempting the same aims—and attaining them!

Obviously there are two basic factors that account for the failure of some drinkers and the relative success—or at least the avoidance

of disaster—of others: one lies in the use of alcohol, the objective question of moderation, and the other in the ultimate personality of the drinker, the highly subjective question of his psychological growth and state. The two are so closely related that they seem to become one, for many times one is hard put to it to dissociate them.

"I like it too well to fool with it," one individual says about liquor, repeating a trite phrase from the legendry of alcohol.

This might be wisdom if he spoke from a genuine awareness of what moderation should mean, and from some knowledge or instinct concerning himself. In my time I used these words often without any wisdom whatever.

Appraisal

I was attracted to alcoholic liquor by a sense of adventure. One of the strongest invitations of life is to try, at least once, what life offers, especially that which is surrounded by a romantic or mysterious tradition. In my early experiences with alcohol, therefore, I was simply playing the part of any boy or any man; the fact that I was a separate, differently constituted person made no special condition. I was pretty much like anyone else.

As I continued to drink, I became better acquainted with the uses and effects of alcohol, but only part of this was conscious knowledge. The unconscious ambitions, dreams, fears, and so on, also discovered what alcohol could and would do for them—and I wasn't aware that a kind of cooperative exchange was taking place. I was relying upon liquor for more than I knew. I was aware of a physical satisfaction, but at the time I thought this was all. I watched it grow with a certain gratification, as one seeks to prolong and repeat any pleasurable experience, counting himself always the gainer.

From a general or occasional satisfaction—gradually taking on the nature of indulgence—I progressed until I was making alcohol the formula for meeting specific occasions and problems. Here, without at all considering the implications, I was cementing the unconscious psychological ties between myself and alcohol. I was

tired or anxious. I took a drink to give myself a lift. For whatever ailed me, I took a drink.

Social drinkers, they say, do not become alcoholics. If you define yourself as a social drinker, then, you are safe.

But I changed from social drinking into dependent drinking and still tried to keep the old definition. I considered myself just a good fellow with a glass or a bottle until long after the conviviality and amenities had become a mere incident by the way, an accidental by-product of a need that could be continuing and unrelenting. My knowledge of myself thus lagged further and further behind the actual state of things.

Ironically, I still called myself a social drinker after the loneliness of the alcoholic had set in. This loneliness is inevitable, because alcohol is exclusive. When I looked forward all day to the release of drink at night, or all week to the release of drink at the weekend, this anticipation displaced normal interests, tugged at my attention, became in time a central drive. My life was narrowed. My activities were fewer. My friendships were less important.

Self-deceit at first was a matter of opportunism. One reasoned away what one did not wish to recognize. But in time self-deceit became a way of life, for expediency became urgency, an abnormal absorption with drinking required artificial adjustment so that the requirements of conventions, behavior, the expectations of others, and all sorts of interruptions would not obstruct the pursuit of drinking. One began by fooling others, adopting subterfuges deliberately, and ended by being the main dupe and, at the very last, the only dupe.

Dishonesty came with self-deceit—not a dishonesty in most matters, but first of all a habit of lying so that often I did not even stop to think of the truth, and later a willingness to steal to get liquor when I needed it. To lie, to cheat, to steal, to conspire. This part of the whole alcoholic scheme was woven in gradually so that I could refuse and finally fail, even if I had desired differently, to see it was there.

But I was sufficiently sensitive to the observation of others and

the effects of many of my own attitudes and actions so that I experienced frequent periods of self-accusation and recrimination. Some guilty feelings I attempted to conceal and rationalize into harmlessness. In the end I substituted for guilt a self-pity that invited the sympathy of others; and also, at times, an aggressiveness designed to prove my proper role in relation to the family, business, and society at large.

I did not usually acknowledge to myself the real extent of dissatisfaction with my work, or apprehension as to my progress or ability to hold my own. As I look back, however, I can see the symptoms of failure and fear. I became more and more touchy. To protect myself, I decided that other people were ruthless, cruel, selfish, and successful without deserving to be. I nourished antagonisms. To be sure, many men I knew were just about as bad as I thought, and this seemed to justify me wholly.

When I made that trip to New London fairly early in my indoctrination into alcoholism, there was no special emotional content in my drunkenness. I was simply on an accidental bender. I had built myself up too high, fanned my sensibilities, pushed on gaily past the points of tolerance. I can think of myself now as fairly innocent. But later my drunkenness meant resentment, cursing, fury. I turned mean, because I had seen and hated and resented so much meanness—and anything that crossed me and my lopsided view of the world and its values was gradually translated into the general concept of meanness. Something for me to begrudge or resent.

But of course this was not intelligible to me, and I am sure the whole significance is not intelligible now. At any rate, I drowned my own reproaches and anxieties and tried a little, through abuse mostly, to re-make the world; and when the effect of my drinking had worn off, I resorted again to alcohol to escape a hideous awakening and to try again the original unequal struggle.

Between my periods of drunkenness, tensions grew, fatigue accumulated, adjustments strained, until, with my physical condition again fit, I was ready to try again that terrible complex of physical appetite and agony, joined with a sequel of expiation, punishment, defiance, and release. It seems to me, at least, that alcohol released

in me no single or simple purpose, but a struggle like that of a massed company.

Physically, my need for alcohol was increased because my capacity was increased. It took more to make me drunk. It took more to give me the inkling of satisfaction, the promise that lured me on though, at last, it never was fulfilled at all. Unconsciousness took the place of fulfillment.

The worst I ever thought of myself was that I was dissipated. I was dissolute. I was intemperate. In the dictionary sense of these words, I squandered my health and money. Sometimes I reproached myself bitterly for wasting my life. I had a bad habit, an addiction to drink that for periods of greater or lesser length I could control, but to which at moments often unlikely and unforeseen, and at other moments by deliberation, I yielded.

I was not only guilty, but in some of my reflections I seemed unfortunate. I was up against stresses that many men never encountered in a lifetime. Circumstances conspired against me.

Even in intervals of self-abnegation, I looked upon the habit of drink as something essentially outside and apart from myself. I had become embroiled with it, but it affected me only through my failure to resist. That it was interwoven deeply and subtly in my own personality I did not suspect; it was simply a thing to control, and sometime I would control it. There was an evil partnership of two, I thought—myself and alcohol—but actually it was all one.

I knew a great deal about alcohol and still thought I needed to know more. With a little better grasp of the whole subject I might acquire the control other men possessed. It did not occur to me that what I most needed to know was more about myself. Not even when I looked in the mirror and saw the physical wear and tear of drinking did I reflect that the first cause was not alcohol itself but something in me.

Surely it was strange that I should resort to liquor when I was in despair and when I was excited and hopeful—looking to the same prescription for opposite reasons. Was alcohol really equally helpful for purposes that were apparently incompatible, or was I jousting with the impossible, like Don Quixote assaulting the windmills.

because of something within my own hidden nature? I permitted, even encouraged, my conscience to torment me, but I never used my reason to this extent. I never saw that for alcohol to be what it was to me, I myself must be critically different from the men who did not let it be anything of the sort to them.

Not for long, wasted years did I seriously consider the possibility, so preposterous at first, that alcoholism was a disease and that I was deeply involved with it as a sick man.

Which Terminates Fatally

I had a disease, the disease of alcoholism which may be arrested and may not be cured, and if not arrested, terminates fatally.

But a friend of mine, an alcoholic, does not believe this doctrine of disease. He says alcoholism can be conceived as a disease only if the defining word is used in some special sense, outside its usual connotations.

The nearest analogy would be reached by considering the sensitivity to alcohol as corresponding to the sensitivity to ragweed pollen and other substances causing a human being to suffer from hayfever. Allergies cause individuals sensitive to strawberries to break out in hives, those vulnerable to certain other substances to be nauseated, to swell up, to suffer pain in various parts of the body. Allergies are real.

But the hayfever sufferer avoids ragweed whereas the alcoholic returns again and again to drinking. Is this craving that overcomes intelligence, willpower, decency, experience, the memory of pain and disgrace, part of a subtle allergy reacting in a subtle way? My friend is incredulous. Certainly there is no germ or virus that can be arraigned as the cause. If this is a disease, it is not like tetanus or smallpox, tuberculosis or whooping cough.

But some diseases are not limited in their symptoms or their effects to the physical side that even the patient may often view with relative objectivity. Many are associated with mental states, irrational behavior, psychic imbalance of one sort or another. The concept of disease is not so limited as some of us think it is.

Haggard and Jellinek in their volume previously quoted show that "the idea that inebriety is a disease was expressed occasionally hundreds of years before it became a definite medical view." They quote a Roman of the second century named Ulpian who said that inebriates should be treated as persons sick or diseased. In 1804 Dr. Thomas Trotter, Scottish physician, declared: "In medical language, I consider drunkenness, strictly speaking, to be a disease; produced by a remote cause, and giving birth to actions and movements in the living body that disorder the functions of health."

Only with present-day knowledge of psychiatry, however, has it been possible to extend the concept of alcoholism as a disease to a point at which even my sceptical friend should be satisfied. *It is a disease that runs deeper than merely physical causes and physical symptoms. The craving of the alcoholic is more than a normal craving. It results from a sickness in the hidden recesses of the personality, a sickness that is genuine and definable.*

"When you're drunk, you know it all and can run the whole country."

So speaks the voice of an arrested alcoholic whose years of bitter experience were many. This sense of power and wisdom is no doubt what some sick spirits crave—and they crave it not because they are wilful or ignorant or tired, but because they are sick. I have referred several times to my old friend, Frank Sulmet, a hard drinker who has never become an alcoholic. Almost everyone knows drinkers like Frank.

They get up in the morning and go to work.

They don't beat their wives.

They don't neglect their children.

They don't have family arguments run through with bitter and false recriminations.

They don't lie and steal and hide liquor to drink on the sly.

Obviously they are not victims of a disease, and obviously alcoholics are. Where else, save between disease on the one hand and reasonably normal behavior on the other, a state of health, can the dividing line be drawn?

The great difficulty, from the alcoholic's own viewpoint, is not

that his malady is without logical explanation, nor that the explanation lacks the weight of medical knowledge and experience, but that its precise nature, and often even its general nature, is hidden from him. He can see symptoms and consequences readily enough, but he cannot see causes. This is, in fact, typical of the disease, for alcoholism cloaks itself in the cleverest disguises a lively intelligence can fabricate.

What the alcoholic may consider as his personality will not admit itself to be ill. This wild, back country of the mind is in league with alcohol, in league with it morbidly and with the proportions of a seriously diseased condition.

Whether the alcoholic has any knowledge of psychiatric terms and functions, or any willingness to consider what is in the "mind" as real and important, he must be aware that when he says "I," he means not only his "mind" but his body too; both are inseparable parts and functions of the self which represents not only the sum of his human existence but his participation in society and the world at large. Is it reasonable that the body, which is in a manner of speaking only one part of his humanity, and a part that cannot exist alone, should always suffer disease quite independently of what he thinks of as his "mind," another part which is inseparable and incapable of earthly existence outside his flesh?

Alcoholism cannot be understood as an allergy alone, but the understanding of allergies can be illuminating for the alcoholic. One step more, recognition that there is a psychic involvement of decisive importance, will take him close to a broader truth.

It is not difficult for anyone to recognize the illness, the disease, of an individual driven into a deep neurosis and incapable of normal participation in society, or of any active participation at all.

But it is difficult for an alcoholic to recognize this side of his own illness even though it alters and deforms his personality, making him lonely, furtive, resentful, prone to black moods and gnawing nerves, in the end a caricature of the individual he was. These alterations, surely, are the work of a progressive disease, running through a series of deteriorating phases, and not of a bad habit which can be conceived as the same for any man.

Doctors have been puzzled, of course, because the causes of alcoholism, at least of the sickness of the personality, cannot be summed up handily. They are not the same for everyone, and each individual must decide for himself where the cause lies for him. He must decide, or let the matter go and assume a cause, which is often an adequate solution if it permits him to re-make his adjustment with the society of his neighbors.

He must realize always that his vulnerability to alcohol—his malady of alcoholism—comes from deep within.

What another person can do in relation to alcohol, he must know, has no bearing whatever on what he himself can do. He is a separate case, and if he has become an alcoholic, a member of that ill brotherhood in which all are bound by the same hopes and despairs—none better or worse, none different—his sickness is nevertheless peculiarly his own. He reached alcoholism by his own road. The forces that gathered in him to bring about this result were as individual and no doubt as complex as the separate uniqueness of his personality.

The end most alcoholics see at the bottom of their long and down-hill road is the doom of a "wet brain," the last stop, for them the finish. But alcoholism is devious and ironic and has other ways of arriving at a fatal termination.

Al Barnes was a painter I knew in the town near which we had gone to live. He was a tall, scraggly man with a slight impediment in his speech, and he was slightly drunk all the time so that no one really knew what he would have been like if he had remained sober. Al was arrested again and again and was sent to the state farm and other institutions from which he returned to renew his drunkenness at the first opportunity.

Finally it was arranged that he should go to live several miles from town in a shack where he could earn a pittance as caretaker of a summer property. His exile was something like that of Hamlet to England: Hamlet's madness and Al's drunkenness would not much matter in the new surroundings.

Sometimes I would see Al on his trips to town—during which, no doubt, he replenished his supply of liquor. He was always the

same, except that in winter he wore a frayed green coat over his dungarees and boots instead of floppy shoes. It was in winter, after one of his returns from town, that his shack caught fire. Apparently he was asleep at the time with a bottle beside him. When the firemen finally arrived with their chemical truck, the shack was destroyed and Al's body could hardly be recognized.

Then there was Frank Watrous, a different type: he was a vigorous, defiant man, somehow carrying youthful recklessness into middle years. He had been a drifter always, though he was intelligent and a good workman when he cared to tie himself down. He had been a heavy drinker from boyhood, although I am not sure he was an alcoholic. He too became a solitary, inhabiting a sort of hermitage in a grove of pines where many respectable citizens were afraid to go at night. Frank went home drunk one winter evening and during the night the fire in his old cast-iron stove went out. Hours too late he was found frozen to death.

Such instances as these are reminiscent of the dire warnings of the old temperance preachers—but that proves nothing one way or another. The fact is that they occurred, and that they stand as typical of many of the tragedies of alcohol, and that they widen the understanding of what is meant, in regard to alcoholism, by the phrase "which terminates fatally."

The future presents each man with a limitless variety of circumstances in which the course of his life may be worked out but, no matter by what path they may be reached, there are some end results that stand as certain and unarguable.

The Pattern

There is an aphorism of the alcoholic who has acquired wisdom: "If you want a drink, take one; if you need a drink, don't."

This need for liquor, a need so compelling that it became the central force of my life for many years, is an insidious and often puzzling thing. For me it existed in different forms and with different urgencies.

Waking on a black morning after, or at any time during an inter-

lude of recovery from a protracted drunkenness—assuming that this state of quaking flesh and agonized nerves can be called recovery—the need was indescribably immediate and important. It was a crying, desperate need, obvious even to the most casual observer, a need such as to lead anyone to administer the remedy forthwith, another drink, or a sedative of some different kind, waiving any moral or ethical consideration, and waiving also any forethought beyond this present crisis.

The other need, not apparent, not open to the sympathy or understanding of the outsider or non-alcoholic, was as intangible as hypnotism or the law of gravitation. Without any change in outer circumstance that could be taken as an effective cause, the impulse would arise like a subterranean force, and the impulse would become need. If resisted, it would build up into unremitting and ever-present need. In any case, it operated with inevitability. Whether spontaneously without forethought and without sense of danger, or deliberately upon the trigger-action of some emotion such as anger or resentment or humiliation, or in a weakness of surrender after a period of fortitude and restraint, I would take a drink, the first drink that meant others. The need operated beyond my power to understand or control.

Yet I never behaved as if alcohol were precious, as if it should be held in esteem in proportion to the influences I have described. On the contrary, I swilled it down. I gulped it. I took drink after drink when the effect of another could not conceivably have offered any selective improvement over the ones already swallowed. The imperative that compelled me was a seeking for satisfaction that never came—unless unconsciousness was the end I sought. Often what I drank was hateful. I needed it but I did not enjoy it.

It is reasonable to say now, with the benefit of hindsight, that I drank so unfastidiously because I did not know why I needed liquor. A person who is crippled knows perfectly well why he needs a crutch. But the need of the alcoholic, the depth and mystery and great force of his disease, is concealed from him—and society at large usually helps with the deception. The alcoholic looks for excuses.

At the moment an excuse may seem valid to him, or at least it may explain the *occasion* of turning to drink. Only in the aftermath of repentant sobriety or when many of these remarkable excuses and explanations are listed together does it become apparent how unreal the reasoning process can become. Only in the slimmest way are most of the excuses related to the fact of the dark, continuing or recurrent need. Studiously they avoid the admission that the need exists without relation to any of these efforts to justify the occasion or to make it seem a normal slip that might happen to anyone.

I took a drink because—

My wife nagged.

It was raining and I missed an appointment. Having nothing to do, I was bored and took just one. . . .

I felt as if I was coming down with a cold.

I missed out on a good piece of business.

I met this old friend and didn't want to high-hat the guy when he suggested a drink.

I put over a deal, a sale, an idea, or I got a big order, so I had to celebrate.

I was under too great a strain and something had to give.

I was at loose ends and felt as if I was going to pieces.

My mother-in-law was around the house.

My stomach felt badly. I was having cramps.

I had to go into this bar to telephone. . . .

The car broke down and there I was . . .

Well, you have to keep your contacts polished up; a drink now and then is part of the game. It's good business.

You don't want me to be unsocial, do you?

I hadn't slept for three nights. . . .

I couldn't do another half hour's work without a shot to keep me going. . . .

I was falling asleep on the job. I had to have something to pull me back to earth.

I had turned down a dozen chances for a drink. You don't expect me to turn into a tin idol, do you? I'm only human.

It was too hot for endurance. I would have died without a tall, cold glass. I drooled for it a couple of hours before I finally fell.

It was so cold my feet were dropping off. I had to stir up my circulation.

I was so jumpy I couldn't sleep.

This guy in the train had been sneezing in my face.

I was worried sick.

I felt so good I didn't realize what I was doing.

A friend died and it threw me.

When a pal has a baby, you *have* to drink with him.

If you knew my nerves the way I do . . . !

I wasn't going to take this drink. How do I know how it happened? Can I read my own mind? I just wasn't thinking, that's all. What's so strange about just taking a drink without analyzing yourself first?

It was this crazy toothache.

The barber shop was right next door to a bar.

I only went in to see what the score was.

I was scared and needed a shot.

I hate to get trimmed at golf.

I had to keep my end up.

She went right by without speaking to me. I was sore.

I hate Harry's guts and I couldn't stand seeing him getting away with that stuff. . . .

The salesman was setting them up and I didn't think anything about it.

I couldn't stand seeing that old man get knocked down by a bus.

Hadn't I proved I could handle the stuff? I'd been on the wagon for weeks.

I was practically faint with hunger and I couldn't eat for another hour.

I had been bawled out at the office and was burned up.

How outrageously can you be treated by a traffic cop—or a conductor, or a man in a store, or the electric light company? Naturally I took a drink.

It was the first of the month and all those back bills. I was all knotted up with worry.

If my wife would only teach those children some manners, I wouldn't feel the way I do. Such a household drives a man to drink.

It is surprising—or perhaps it isn't—how much less plausible an alcoholic excuse seems when it is in company with a great number of others than when it is offered alone, upon some separate occasion, with the earnestness of one who at the moment believes it himself.

I can see now that I did not even make up my own excuses; I borrowed them from the central pool upon which all alcoholics draw. Rarely is one of these excuses novel or individual or other than specious. Virtually all are part of an old, old stock in trade, the folk lore of alcoholism.

The alcoholic excuses or justifies himself in order to gloss over as painlessly as possible his latest excess. But his deeper purpose is to put himself before family, friends, and associates as a perfectly normal individual who has acted upon circumstances or from natural inner motives as any other normal person would have acted. The chances are he does not know he has a disease, but he cannot fail to be aware of the reality of the difference between him and men who live reasonably with liquor. This *difference* he must conceal carefully and elaborately if his life is to run on always as before.

As for myself, I look over these excuses and think of others. Trite, absurd, disingenuous—yet important; important because in phrases not much different from these my life was spun out for year upon year with truth hidden on the other side. Uneasy, crafty, too much protesting words, but words representing time, the lost time of the alcoholic. If all the time thus ticked off for all alcoholics could be estimated, it would amount almost to an eternity.

To be correlated with these spoken pretenses, rationalizations, and so on, are the unexpressed but no less false and important fantasies of the drinker: the self pity, the repeated assurance that things will be different soon or later or next time, the fear of having to do without alcohol and the persistent inner exhortation that normal drinking is just around the corner. Postponements in the form of excuses or excuses in the form of postponements, all marking off the alcoholic calendar, the passage of time.

6. *Twenty-five Years with Alcohol*

IN MY case, as I have written, the alcoholic calendar ran for some twenty-five years.

If I could really see myself and my life objectively, as I try to do, my point of view would be clearer, my critical sense sharper, and I would say things about myself that I haven't yet said. This goal of accurate perspective and pure truth is unattainable, but a man who is willing to face reality and stand beyond his own shadow should make measurable progress toward it. Let me try more earnestly.

What about this man who bears my name?

He came of what is called a good middle-class family. He had the advantages of a good home, he was brought up within the conventions of respectable America, he associated with others like himself. He was taught to be ambitious and to accept the canons of honesty, thrift, hard work, respect toward others. If he had followed what seemed his predestined course, he would have become a reflection in most respects of the America in which he lived—at least of his part of it.

He went away to preparatory school and college, and by so doing acquired some independence from the home background. He began to be a more separate human being. He was required to meet the tests of outside opinions, those of teachers, other students, men and women among whom he went. He made common cause with his own age group, as boys and young men do, and in the main he got on well, though he was never an acknowledged leader. His real satisfaction was to be absorbed into the life of the moment, and

the question of making something of himself was a fairly remote one for a long time.

This last may need some amplification, for he had ambition of a kind as he had been taught, and he surely experienced a healthy appetite for the rewards of success. But all this was general, a great matter pending, while specific and immediate things might be, and in fact usually were, unrelated. He accepted the orientation of the group but he did nothing to choose any direction for himself. He formed no special purpose in regard to his own life that could be called the result of intellectual growth or emotional maturity. He grew older but he did not leave behind the emotions and responses of youth.

This sounds like a phrase that might be used by psychiatrists and other clinically-minded people. I don't know exactly what they would mean by it, but what I mean by it is this:

The boy's vanity was easily hurt. So was the man's later on—there wasn't too much change there. The boy tried to cover up, to pretend he wasn't bothered. Many times he took pains to cover up ahead of time to avoid being snubbed or wounded.

He turned things into a laugh. This was a good way out of awkward situations or those minor predicaments in which something was expected of him that he couldn't or didn't want to provide. He substituted good fellowship for relations in which there might be unfavorable criticism. Even with the masters at prep school he was often funny. He liked to be liked.

He was indifferently successful in athletics, never one of the good players in any sport, but sometimes he got into the charmed circle as manager or substitute. There was likely to be fun when he was around. He knew this advantage and kept pushing it.

He was deeply tender and romantic but this side of his nature he kept pretty much to himself. Later on it became still more a separate province until, as a man, he was able to regard himself as sympathetic and brimming with humanity even when, under the long influence of alcohol, he consistently hurt and wronged his wife and family. His sons might cringe in his presence but he bought peanuts for pigeons that were scavenging in a city street. He could

not bear the suffering of animals, and tears stood in his eyes when he heard even an inferior rendition of some sentimental song.

He enjoyed all sorts of triumphs, real or fictitious. He can still remember boyhood games in which he played the part of a freely adapted Monte Cristo achieving revenge upon persecutors. This he enjoyed always. He was capable of much more hostility than he or anyone around him realized. It arose sometimes from a feeling of helplessness against superior force or authority, and sometimes from a sense of injustice. It never was a reasoned thing. Long after he had become a man, some of this buried childish hostility would be uncovered by his drunkenness, and he would strike out as blindly and foolishly as a child strikes out in a temper.

The background of his boyhood and adolescence probably had a good deal to do with his choice of a profession, for it did not require him to grasp and meet most situations in terms of immediate actuality. Ideas often did as well as actions. He did not like detail. He escaped from it. He produced his ideas and made them more and more elaborate in the form of advertising or promotional campaigns that required conferences and large-scale projection into the future, but after the preliminaries had been completed, he liked to have someone else follow through. He always wanted to be getting on to something fresh—to the next big idea, the next batch of plans, the next enthusiasm. He was not lazy, and he punished himself unmercifully while the creative work was in progress. He felt a tremendous drive and never realized that it reached fulfillment only in words.

His particular ability or talent, as he saw it, made him impatient of annoying restraints. At times, all restraints were annoying. He hated delays and interruptions on the part of others, but often he was hurt when he could not take his own time about things. He was aware of an importance that ought to be recognized, though he would have denied this inasmuch as he was apt to ridicule importance in anyone else. He hated being tied to routine, yet routine going along around him was necessary to make him feel adjusted and secure. He needed to be part of the business group, and he was often happiest when he was involved in routine yet breaking its

rules. He didn't like discipline. He didn't like prolonged application to any job.

Looking back upon him and his career now, it seems to me that he never did really live in the present day. He was always building himself into the future. Everything was sure to go over big—tomorrow, later on. Today's idea was all right but tomorrow's would be better.

A consequence of this attitude, this habit of mind, was that he could always excuse himself from unpleasant pressure at any particular time. Of course he was not really excused, but he cherished the justification produced in his own mind; and therefore he resented, either as needless annoyance or stupid interference, any and all unpleasantness that seemed to interfere with the flow of his creative plans. In this same way he postponed the need for concrete accomplishment. He told himself that the harvest would come at the appropriate time.

He knew the harvest would come—yet at times he doubted. Alcohol helped out whether he was in an optimistic mood or a pessimistic one, but most of all when he was emotionally built up, unrelieved, frustrated, in need of the reassurance his life and job were not providing. Fatigue, tension, excitement of many sorts, were also invitations to alcohol.

Not only did he look to the future, the golden future, rather than the present, but I realize now that he drew upon the past. He had never been required to leave off being his old self, and therefore he went along from year to year, following the easiest course, retaining the comfortable impressions of youth and boyhood. Why should he have made himself encounter, face to face, complexities and realities that could be evaded or covered up by old habits of thought or fancy? Growing up emotionally is painful, or at least it would have been for him, and so he didn't grow up emotionally.

Often it seemed to him that he was in a fortunate position. He could see the advantages of his job, his profession, its creative side, its salesmanship, its prestige in the business group, its incitement to what was new and big. But at other times he doubted. He felt insecure, uncertain.

"What have I got?" he asked himself. That might well be a boy's question too. An adult knows what he has got.

He became utterly tired and disillusioned, for he could not live always at a high pitch. Weariness and disillusionment were the same thing, though in reason they should not have been. When he was overtired, the bottom dropped out. He was sorry for himself and it was easy for him to be aggrieved against other people or against circumstance.

He might have suspected that in this whole fluctuating relationship there was wrapped a central problem of personality—his own. But if he did suspect, he quickly turned his attention in another direction and found other objects for inquiry. Perhaps he was too shrewd to allow himself to be found out. It was much easier to take refuge in flights of fancy or rages or excuses—or drink. Alcohol was the perfect instrument with which to rebuild his self-assurance and to wipe out afflictions, large or small.

Unhappy State

Year followed year, and he never discovered how to be happy though sober. There were intervals of contented sobriety, but in the main sobriety meant pain and the return of unpleasant days and nights.

At first, when he stopped drinking, he found respite from physical distress and nervous exhaustion, along with the satisfaction of good conduct. But this was never why he stopped, and stopping became an agonized process. Sometimes he left off drinking simply because he could not go any longer; after a prolonged affair with alcohol, day in and day out, he simply could not take another drink. The liquor wouldn't go down. Then revulsion accompanied the ordeal of recovery, and conscience was one ingredient of the proper antidote. Conscience and good resolutions.

But the glow of moral purpose did not last, and this was partly because his periods of sobriety were essentially so unhappy. He never learned, he never suspected, that to stop drinking was not an end in itself. He thought that was the answer, but it wasn't. Perhaps it wasn't half the answer. What he needed was to find happi-

ness, satisfaction, an adjustment of his life under conditions of sobriety.

In other words, the drinking was not the real problem, at least not all of it. When he stopped drinking, he simply stopped using the device he had made so necessary to himself in avoiding, alleviating, or living with the realities. After a period of years, he became a pretty peculiar character and alcohol helped him live with himself. Nothing was much altered when he stopped drinking except that he was then required to get along without the help of alcohol—and it simply wasn't in him any longer to endure himself and the world without that physical and emotional sorcery.

Told in this way, and no doubt over-simplified, the story seems pretty easy—but this isn't the way it happened. Theories and explanations come afterward. My life, exactly as I have recounted this much of it already, was one of developing circumstances. Some incidents were relevant to my deeper personal problems, and some weren't; I did not know which. It never occurred to me to try to make any differentiation. The events of each day simply took place with no more apparent meaning than the weather.

At any given moment when I might have tried to understand and reflect, I could have had before me only a little of the evidence. I was confined to a day of the week, an hour of the day, tinted as much by my immediate state of mind as the air outside by sun or fog or cold. About me were the crazily-shaped shadows, often distorted to my observation, of men and women who touched and influenced my life. I could not step out of the pattern or even see its outline.

But I think now that I might have realized the one most significant thing of all: *the reason sobriety always became an unhappy, unstable state was not the fault of sobriety but of something in me.*

I thought a good deal about liquor. I was told about it. I read about it. I brooded upon its nature and effects. But I never paid the same attention to what is known as sobriety. Other men, I recounted to myself over and over again, got along with liquor and handled it sensibly and properly, but I was never wise enough to reflect that other men got along with sobriety too, and handled that

sensibly and properly. I knew a good deal about my trouble with liquor but nothing at all about my trouble with sobriety—that I was failing to make a sober state satisfactory or practical for myself.

Sobriety was the result of an act of will, just as Niagara Falls are the result of a river dropping over a cliff—a pretty cold and remote business! Was there no more to it than such an impersonal majesty, no more than the absence of liquor and the demonstration of will-power? For me, if I had reasoned it through, this would have meant that sobriety consisted almost solely of the absence of relief and happiness, a state in which I was restrained from trying for life and fulfillment (no matter how vainly) through alcohol.

Sobriety would have been a complete negation, alcohol the only affirmation.

This, of course, is the opposite of the truth an alcoholic needs to know. He makes sobriety his negation, or permits it to be this, and he woos alcohol for the effect it continually promises but never provides save for some fleeting, half-imagined moment. For him, because he is an alcoholic, alcohol is a poison. It can never again be one of the good things of life. It can never yield to him the genial, moderate services it yields for a normal person.

Yet still he does not seek to discover what it is that for him shuts off the values and rewards of the sober state. He tries prayer. He tries hobbies. He tries physical exercise. He tries cold baths, eating chocolates, chewing gum, a sense of duty, emulation of some admired man of principle. He tries anything that promises hope as an alternative to alcohol—but he does not explore the possibilities of sobriety as a fruitful, productive state in relation to himself. He fights a rear-guard action, his eyes always looking backward, and never looks alertly ahead.

Someone will say that sobriety in itself is not productive, that it is an empty state and must remain so until or unless it is filled by the living actors of our human society. This is not quite true. Sobriety is not as external as the environment or the weather; it is interwoven with the habits and nature of personality. And only

denials or distortions of personality make it appear empty, fearful, barren, haunted.

But, on the other hand, alcoholism does become an empty state, for it adds nothing to the personality and as it progresses it narrows and steadily destroys many of the resources of the personality. It comes to represent a series of grotesque holidays from reality and from life as life is meant to be lived.

In any case, it is from within that the remedy must come. The individual himself must be the discoverer, though there is much help if he is willing to accept help. He must accept a forthright, undistorted relationship between himself and the terms of the actual world and of society about him. He must give up fantasy, alcoholic fantasy in particular, and instead of circling in the old, narrow groove, he must open himself to the give and take that are natural to human association.

Through a new realization of his own rich humanity—for all humanity is rich—he will make the sober state as genuinely satisfying as he tried in vain to make the alcoholic state; and at last he will be not only able and willing, but eager, to live fully in the present day without turning fugitive into yesterday and tomorrow.

Major and Minor

This man I used to be was not obtuse or undiscerning. On the contrary, he was perceptive and rather more sensitive than most. Alcoholics are likely to have these qualities. Many of them are brilliant. They have active, ranging minds, a vast store of energy recklessly spent, a nervous force that drives them and lifts them out of the ruck of everyday.

But what this man saw as he lived along from day to day was mostly a series of minor irritations and petty problems. Hardly one of them was worth bothering about—certainly none was worth the sacrifice of years and the ordeal of alcoholism.

One set of problems was entirely external and mechanical. In the beginning they did not bother this man much, but as his personality deteriorated with the progress of alcoholism, they caused un-

reasonable irritation and added to his feeling of persecution and resentment. The bus was late, supper wasn't ready, a girl in the office was chewing gum noisily, he had to keep an early appointment or a late one, he was overcharged or short-changed, somebody next door was burning garbage.

But many problems were more significant. He was tired to the point of exhaustion, the boss didn't appreciate him, his wife insisted on doing things he didn't like, he was on edge about getting approval for a project, he thought he was losing out in rivalry at the office, he was called down by a policeman, he had to attend a meeting of big-shots who were way out of his class, he was afraid he had gone too far out on a limb in trying to sell an idea, one of his best ideas was rejected, the next idea was rejected too, he had overlooked something in his work and was caught at a disadvantage, he had to go through with something he was heartily sick of.

And there were hidden problems that he never knew about, the buried difficulties of his personality that emerged only in disguise or under cover of pretexts.

In spite of his keen edge, he saw no difference in the annoyances, frustrations, and antagonisms that faced him. He made no distinction and never tried to make a distinction between what was important and what was trivial. His reactions were always the same in any case—petulance, annoyance, disappointment, anger, hurt pride. He did not know himself well enough to be aware that where his self-esteem, possessiveness, need for sympathy or affection—these and other deep cravings that had been part of his character from the beginning—were involved, the matter was a central and important one.

With intelligence and reason he could have sorted out the stumbling blocks and reduced a great number of them to trivial proportions. Instead he used them all to provide outlets for the secret and continuing frustration that never had an identity in his consciousness.

As alcoholism progressed, he was more and more concerned with himself, but not with a real self. He made up a personality and believed it was real.

The tortures he suffered were, he thought, unique. He was involved in difficulties, humiliations, a mighty effort unappreciated by anyone else. No one could understand. He was absorbed in strange mental and spiritual adventurings. He followed with rapt attention his own imaginative states, sometimes looking on as an impressed and rather horrified spectator, sometimes agitating himself into extreme emotional experiences. He laughed wildly. He wept wildly. He drank.

The more important this made-up existence and absorption became to him, the less able he was to see himself clearly. He was lost, lost in himself, as an explorer may be lost in a jungle. The whole was nowhere visible, but around him closed in the multitude of impressions, excitements, suspicions, hopes, pretenses, fears, and rationalizations that alcohol fostered, magnified, and at times made all-powerful.

Toxic Chemical

All this, as they say, was in the head. He knew his troubles were associated with alcohol, but he thought this was because his body craved and needed alcohol—which was true, but only one part of the truth.

What had happened to him physically through the use of alcohol was surely enough to blind him to the need of looking into his psychic or spiritual side—though he believed he *was* looking into this. He was peering with constant anxiety, twisting and straining, day by day and night by night, without discovering any helpful sign or, indeed, any information about alcoholism. He had less chance of learning any truth than a hypochondriac has through introspection alone. He knew that if he drank enough, alcohol would blank everything out, but so far as the relationship of alcohol and the mind or spirit was concerned, this was not very adequate knowledge.

He thought the physical effect of alcohol was due largely to its interference with nutrition. If you drank, you didn't get enough vitamins. He had been told this in conversation with people of different types—his brother, a doctor, a minister who had done

some reading on the subject. You didn't get enough vitamins or the alcohol prevented your system from absorbing them. Well, this wasn't too bad—during periods when you were on the wagon you would get back into shape again. You would bring your nutrition up to standard and that would be that.

There was always the evidence, open for all to see, that most people could drink without harm, even with benefit. This fact would serve as a kind of alcoholic emancipation proclamation when you felt sick of body and spirit.

But how explain the craving? How get around the conditioning that had made alcohol indispensable, that had sharpened every separate cell and nerve of the body into the single relentless appetite? In the end you couldn't explain it, though you went on hoping to. You couldn't quite get around it. You might be sober for a while, but the old desire was there again, magnifying itself into obsession and suffering unless it was gratified.

"The craving a man has for a cigarette after he has been a constant smoker for years and is trying to cut it out, is only a tenth or a hundredth part of the craving an alcoholic has for liquor," remarked a friend of mine who should know.

How was it possible that this physical conditioning, apart from all else, should not have been recognized by the man himself as a disease, an illness, a morbid condition? The question hangs in mid-air. There is no answer. But a partial answer is that he clung to the rationalization that he could, sometime, exert control if he exerted his will. He refused to admit that the craving for alcohol and its effect were beyond his control in the same sense that epilepsy or tuberculosis are beyond the control of the patient.

If this man, the man I was for so many years, had been able to understand that alcohol, harmless to a multitude of his fellow creatures, was for him, consumed as he was bound to consume it, a toxic chemical, he would have been helped toward enlightenment. If, added to this, he had realized that diseases are not all caused by germs or viruses and that all are not characterized by easily observable physical symptoms, or even by any mental breakdown at a

particular time, he might have come even closer and more quickly to the truth.

If alcoholism were simply a bad habit in which a drinker takes too much liquor, a legion of hard drinkers like my friend Frank Sulmet would turn into alcoholics—but they don't. And too much liquor could surely and readily be remedied by taking less—but it isn't. For the alcoholic, there is no such thing as taking less, no matter how much he may try.

Here I think it is necessary to quote somebody's words that will reinforce my own, for the matter is one requiring expert authority, not the word of experience from an alcoholic. I am referring to a popular book by deliberation, not to a technical one, with the aim of the easiest understanding.

Dr. George H. Preston, in *Psychiatry for the Curious*, already quoted, declares that "alcohol is an actual bodily poison . . . there is no question that in sufficient dosage it can produce permanent damage. The fact that this type of damage may be due in part to lack of adequate vitamin intake or absorption is not of very great importance to those of us who are interested in human behavior except in so far as it may point to ways in which this type of damage may be reduced or treated."

This is a psychiatrist's point of view. And Dr. Preston goes on to point to an additional deadliness. Alcohol, he says, is socially poisonous because it corrupts and destroys the alcoholic's relationship among the fellowship of human beings.

To the alcoholic, because the quantity he must drink and the manner in which he drinks are abnormal, and because of his illness, since he is conditioned morbidly and his drinking is susceptible only to increase and never to diminution, alcohol is a toxic chemical.

No matter for how long he leaves it alone, this fact cannot change.

As Others See Us

I always had pride.

I was not conceited in a general sense, or disdainful, but I

had—in the words of one dictionary definition—a sense of my own worth. One aspect of this sense is a curious faith that the individual is different from other people. Sometimes this unquestioned feeling of difference makes him a sort of king—in his own mind.

I admitted to faults and mistakes, though not to the ones that really mattered most, and always with the inner reservation that such lapses would be cancelled out in the long run. I didn't put this into words, but the idea was persistently one of the modifiers of my behavior. I had an inextinguishable confidence that I would be all right, a feeling I now believe links up with the imaginative world of the child. The child has a fairyland into which he retreats at will. So I retreated in this different way—largely because I was proud.

As my alcoholism progressed, my inner reservations were of course sharpened, but my pride was not diminished. In time I reached the peculiar and contradictory state of falling drunk in the street before the eyes of men and women I considered meaner and cheaper and less intelligent than myself, yet of being too proud to admit that I was anything like other drunks, or that my drinking was a problem too difficult for me to solve. I would have been too proud to admit I was an alcoholic, but I did not yet know what an alcoholic was.

The pride that can be reconciled with habitual drunkenness, with repeated stays in hospitals and sanitariums, with lying, theft, and deceit (even if these be on a small scale), is surely a strange and ironic sort of pride, but it was the sort I had, and it is the sort other alcoholics have.

Drunkenness and alcoholic excesses are external and objective facts, but alcoholics have internal, subjective methods of refusing to face them.

As soon as the alcoholic is sober, the foolish emptiness of pride sets in again, and he sees the troubles of others as different from his own.

I always had this pride. In twenty-five years it did not seem to wear thin, at least not any thinner than it was in the beginning; and in the end I postponed again and again doing anything about

of other alcoholics, even reformed ones. That word "reform" seems to creep in everywhere, a relic of obsolete thinking, but as a word it will do as well as any other. After all, a reform is a cure, though it would sound odd to refer to reformed victims of tuberculosis.

If pride is one part of the illness of alcoholism, a prop by which the alcoholic sustains himself in the progress along a descending scale, it is also nourished by a general social attitude. The community near which I came to live, for instance, demanded an assumption of respectability. Alcoholism was not respectable. An individual could not acknowledge it. Though the facts about him were known many times over, a fiction had to be preserved because the conventions seemed to require it.

It was not only that the alcoholic, particularly hampered by the unrealistic thinking associated with his disease, could not and would not if he could, see himself as others saw him; the others would not let him know how they saw him, except on rare occasions. If there was evasion and deceit on his side, there was evasion and deceit on the side of the social order.

Those old time alcoholics, defeated, hopeless, complete victims of their obsessed drinking of decade after decade, who lost their pride, and then even the last shadow of their pride, lost all else in the community in which they tried to go on living. When pride and pretense were gone, what else could be left?

Thus the blandness and falseness of society connived at a continuing situation in which an alcoholic was encouraged to go on fooling himself, and the community would talk about him behind his back with the utmost frankness but would say to his face, "Sure, you're a fine fellow. You have a sense of your own worth. We'll let it go at that—for the time being."

Economics

At times I was hard up, but no matter what other effect a lack of prosperity might have, it never did interfere with my drinking.

What a man earns is not only a measure of his standard of living but of his place in the world. My life, seen from this point of view, was a succession of ups and downs, heights and depths, but never

of triumphs. Alcohol always took the best moments and the promise of fulfillment was never realized. In the long run, the course was downward.

I used to think that alcohol helped me to work. I needed it in order to buckle down and get the job done. I needed it to see the strain and pressure through. I needed it when I was tired and dispirited. It seemed to me that alcohol was associated with my most intense and often my most productive intervals. I could taste success and only knew afterward and too late that at the most critical moment of all, I had been engaged in throwing it away.

Drinking was responsible for many times when it was necessary to spend money, but a lack of money never interfered much with drinking. Alcoholism is open-handed, improvident, removed from the operation of the laws of economics. I wanted other people to think well of me, and I wanted to think well of myself.

What should have been my productive years were years of waste. This I know, but I am not sure to this day whether it was alcohol that most interfered with my success as an economic man, or whether it was the wrong sort of attempt to make money that helped me become an alcoholic. One final judgment is that life is not a matter of dollars and cents, and the effort to make it so—to be “practical” in all given situations—cannot solve anything.

Except that I did not change jobs often, until my final break with the city, my career was like that of many alcoholics. I told myself I must just keep trying to get along. It was the most practical thing to patch things up and keep going within the same old terms of making a living, for these seemed to come ahead of such theoretical considerations as a possible reconstruction of my life and a fresh adjustment at financial sacrifice.

Always More of the Same

If, at the beginning, Alice and I had known what was to happen, we would have drawn back in horror and fright. But neither of us could see my life in the large; there was not enough of it in sight at any one time. The awareness of alcoholism came to us only in glimpses, and by the time we might have had a long

view, we had both changed and become involved as participants in a tragedy of our own. One cannot be both a participant and a spectator.

Alcoholism came to us a little at a time, and after a while it appeared in a series of emergencies which had to be met, not with detached wisdom, but out of expediency. Each experience, much as we would have rebelled against the idea, prepared us by involuntary and unconscious conditioning for the next, and thus we were led on, until we were only actors.

An alcoholic is an actor. I speak from experience, for the things I did were not of my own planning or purpose. My fabulous ailment provided me with a disguise, as actors on the stage are costumed for their parts.

It was not to my liking to see my children cringe, or to see them studying me covertly to discover what mood and condition I was in, whether they could come and go normally as children in conventional families do. At times I peeped out through or around my mask, terribly weary and disgusted with it, and seemed to see the whole scene for what it was, and felt sorry for Alice, the children, and for myself. But the tragedy had to go on. To find what I needed in alcohol, or even to seek it, I had to do so on alcohol's own terms. Losing myself was part of the bargain.

Surely, as I understand now, some deep purpose of mine—though I did not know it—was to lose a part of myself and of reality, and there could be no holding back when more and more went by the board.

Day to day, there was no choice in my ill condition that I could consider. In the periods of sobriety, everything might appear well enough, but the next scene was already prepared, and even when I denied it to myself, I must secretly have known this. With pretexts and evasions and excuses, the time approached when I answered an alcoholic cue and took the "first" drink.

"I take one and I've got to have a hundred."

This is the alcoholic's compulsion, his sentence, the part he must play through. Where, then, does any choice come in?

I would not or could not consider putting alcohol forever beyond

my reach. That was the real choice, the one I was not willing even to recognize.

As for the rest, the decisions that had to be made were of day-to-day expediency. How to make our lives approach as nearly as possible to the accepted thing, how to make allowance for my independence (to say the least), how to keep the family together, how to maintain our integrity before the world, and not least our pride.

Not one of these decisions, which in the long run were the only decisions I was concerned in making, had anything to do with my real problem and the problem of my family. This central issue was evaded, postponed, talked at and around, but never solidly confronted. The nearest we came to meeting it squarely was when my brother joined Alice in persuading me to go to the country, one more instance of expediency though it was intended to be a solution.

All the years passing by, stretching out so tragically, and nothing done except to palliate and improvise in order to compromise with and accommodate my alcoholism. This was all my doing, because I could not be different.

Because I could not be different!

All else, it seemed, was variable, but my alcoholism was fixed. It always turned out that way, though we waited for a miracle and patched up our lives from day to day until the miracle should come. To put it differently, we did nothing that counted.

There can be no other vital personal problem that men and women will suffer to continue so long without effective action, and no other such waste of precious faith and hope. I think of Alice and her willingness to accept my promises after repeated betrayals—of all I threw away I regret this perhaps most of all. She gave me opportunity after opportunity to be what she thought me. I tried and failed. I tried with great determination but without any realism whatever.

The French philosopher Bergson called attention to the fact that anyone, looking ahead, may see an endless variety of pleasant possibilities. The future is a storehouse of expectations and hopes, for

the future as we think of it is only an idea, and we furnish it to suit ourselves. When the infinite chance disappears and the coldly finite certainty arrives, we are bound to be cheated of many of our dreams. No single existence, even at best, could embrace more than a small number of the boundless opportunities of life.

We know this truth, yet still our imagination runs without limit, our dreams and fantasies make different choices each day, we build our hope and sometimes even our confidence out of the idea of life's fruitfulness without appraising our own capacities and circumstances, or even the direction in which we are going.

Since this is true generally, how easy it is to understand the flight of alcoholics and their families from the ugliness and despair of today into the idea of the future. There can be no facing of the bitter fact that what is ahead is certain to be simply more of the same.

Only the one effective decision, with all that must be involved in supporting it, could alter the prospect. The alcoholic must stop drinking and ways be found to make his life without alcohol supportable if nothing more than that.

Cures and Cures

My trip to the sanitarium where I met the poet and his dog was not my last experience in such an institution. There was a day when Alice entertained some friends I didn't like, one woman particularly who was, I am now willing to admit, not only harmless but probably deserving of sympathetic understanding. I objected to her tittering, and made fun of her.

"That old crone!" I said to Alice. "Why couldn't you wait until Halloween?"

"Oh, Pete!"

"O.K.," I said, "but she's still an old crone. That laugh of hers comes straight from the monkey house."

"She's my friend and I like her."

"Last time she was here she tried to give me the evil eye."

"So that's it," said Alice. "She didn't look at you admiringly enough. She rubs you the wrong way. Well, I'm sorry."

"I don't care for the admiration of anyone like her, and that wasn't a nice remark."

"Nice or not, it's true," said Alice. "I suppose you've heard something she said about you."

"What did she say about me?"

"Oh Pete, let's drop this. Why do you have to be on the defensive all the time?"

We dropped it at last, though not right away. I meant to take a drink or two, no more, because I was brimming with hostility. I didn't reason about the situation, of course, but my story would have been that a drink or two wasn't going to hurt me or anyone else and that I needed a shot badly. I was certain that the old crone, as I called her, had been talking about my personal habits. Alice must have known all about it but wasn't telling me.

When the guests of the afternoon departed, Alice did not find me around the house or in the barn or at the edge of the woods on our place where the road goes through. I don't know just where I was or what had happened. Time had gone blank. Late that night I was brawling on Main Street and the police waited for a doctor before they took me in.

I sobered up at another cure that did not cure, a sanitarium that received alcoholics, kept them for a while, freshened them up, and sent them back to their homes and families.

In the interlude of sobriety and penitence that followed this experience, I reflected that my situation must be desperate. No longer, it seemed, could I simply get drunk, remain drunk for a while, and pull out of it slowly but surely through the familiar horror, shaking and writhing in the vestibule of sobriety. No, the business of drinking for me had new complications, ominous ones. A few drinks and I turned into a medical case. There had to be a doctor with a hypodermic, and I had to be institutionalized in order to pull me out of the debauch and back into orderly existence.

The reflection was grim. I was an intelligent man in spite of my alcoholism, and I saw the implications. Under the circumstances my repentance was more earnest than ever, my determination more convincing to me and, I thought, to Alice.

Yet of course there was a next time.

Everything had been going well. I had stopped drinking and remained sober for almost three months, long enough to regain the cockiness that in an alcoholic is substituted for confidence and poise. It seemed to me there was no present likelihood that I would take another drink. I told myself I had been doing well, damned well, and that I deserved a good deal of credit.

The season was early fall, and I had stepped out of doors in the late evening to see the moonlight flooding the fields. I can remember the sound of crickets and other night insects, and the currents of warm air, sweet-scented, that seemed to drift across our doorway. Then my glance fell on an old gray fencepost at one corner of the yard. At the bottom of that post, sometime in the alcoholic past, I had hidden a pint of Bourbon.

Was it still there, I wondered? Of course not—I would have emptied that cache along with all my others at the time of my last bender. I could not even remember just when I had secreted that particular Bourbon—maybe it was much longer ago than I remembered.

I walked over to the post, without deliberation, without any haste or inner excitement, my hands still in my pockets. I kicked at the ground with one foot. The earth seemed fairly solid. I can remember that I smiled ruefully. I was curious about this post as a landmark of my drinking career. I would have to settle to my own satisfaction whether the whisky was still down there, covered over with sod and moss. I kneeled and scraped away the earth with my hands. It crumbled quite easily.

A small miracle—there it was, a pint of good Bourbon. I held it up in the moonlight. Still without deliberation, I used my pocket knife to cut the seal. I twisted the cork out. I lifted the bottle and drank experimentally. I didn't need a drink. I hadn't even been thinking about liquor, but the taste and sensation of the whisky in my mouth and throat, then making itself so familiarly at home in my stomach, brought back all the old feelings.

This had happened so suddenly that I was both astonished and contrite. I replaced the cork and put the bottle back in its hiding

place. I returned to the house, said something to Alice about the beautiful moonlight, and in a few minutes went up to my room to bed. I was as nervous and as keyed-up as a ballet dancer just before a performance. The deliberation and forethought I had failed to exercise out of doors a little while before were beyond my power now; the chance to refrain from drinking another month, another day, another hour, had slipped away. Another minute seemed too long.

I raised my bedroom window as silently as I could, slipped out on the roof, clambered along the ridgeboard to the gable end, and used the gutter pipe to clamber down to the ground. A couple of minutes later I had my second drink of the night—to my excited nerves and body cells it came just in time. They didn't think they could have survived a second longer without alcohol. What did I think? I am quite sure I wasn't thinking at all. I was coasting. I was on the way.

I finished the pint and started for town on foot to get more whisky. The old performance was being enacted again, the alcoholic on the warpath; the banging around from house to house until I found a friend who would let me have a bottle to get rid of me, the familiar stages of the spree.

This time, under the early fall moon, the weather turned cold before morning. I was found in an open field, chilled enough so that Alice and the doctor were afraid of pneumonia. I wound up in the hospital where I was not wanted, an unwelcome problem to all concerned, but somehow they saw me through.

7. *The Turn of the Road*

I AM glad to come to this new chapter, partly because it gives me a chance—more than that, an obligation—to speak of other alcoholics and not alone of myself. This joint experience is one I can recount to my sons with satisfaction they will not fail to understand.

Not long after my hospitalization, a stranger stopped at the house to see me. Well, he wasn't entirely a stranger. I knew him by sight, a gray-haired, business-man type, dressed for the country, and with a faint smell of tobacco about him. He had a summer place in town, and he often stayed late into the fall before going back to his city home.

"I hear you're having trouble with liquor," he said.

He was an A. A.—one of the Alcoholics Anonymous, a fellowship now world wide with far more than a hundred thousand members, all men and women participating in a program of recovery from alcoholism. At the beginning, back in 1935, there were only two members. Of this I understood little, and the man who approached me was somebody I had never really met, knew only slightly, and cared to know less. Yet he had spoken these words to *me*. A man's home is his castle, and so are his privacy, his pride, his self-esteem, his bulwark against the world. All these are impregnable, or ought to be.

"I hear you're having trouble with liquor."

Yes, he said that to *me*. In my unspoken thoughts I snapped back, "Mind your own business, you son of a bitch!"

The Case of Warren Fulbright

I knew this visitor much better later on. His name was Warren Fulbright and he was on the far side of middle age, a stocky, solid man who must have been powerful in his youth. He had gray eyes and usually a pleasant expression around them. His hair was gray-white.

A time came when he told me his story with complete frankness. He was born in one of the smaller cities of New England, the son of a dealer in lumber who was comfortably established but not in any sense wealthy. There was money enough to send Warren to Brown University where he did well both in academic work and in various college activities. He joined the Glee Club, became its manager and for a while was captain of the football team.

"I was always managing something or acting as the boss of something all my life," he told me.

On Saturday nights he and some of the other college boys would go into downtown Providence and have a few beers while they talked of all sorts of things and, more likely than not, sang songs that made them feel the good way college boys feel when they are singing songs. But otherwise he did not drink and there was no indication that alcohol would ever be a problem to him.

Warren looked forward to a business career. In his home city the atmosphere was all of cotton textiles, for in that field the general prosperity and the fortunes of most individuals seemed to lie. It happened that an uncle of his had founded one of the early mills back around 1870 and was now the head of a thriving business with branch houses in some of the larger cities. Warren went to see his uncle and was sent to New York to try his ability in the head sales office, with the understanding that he must make good on his own. That was the way he wanted it.

During his first weeks and months he learned all he could about the business in the warehouse and the office, and after the apprenticeship period was over he found himself in the streets of the greatest city of all, engaged in selling cotton textiles in competition with the

best salesmen of the industry. He succeeded. Now and then he took a drink with a customer, but that was about the extent of his drinking. Liquor was no problem. He did not crave it or need it.

After two years in New York, his uncle sent him to a new branch in Cleveland where things had been going badly.

"If you make good, fine," his uncle said. "If not, out you go."

Once more that was the way he wanted it. He took over the managership in Cleveland and applied himself energetically. He stayed there six years, tripled the sales, originated and built up a profitable specialty business, and turned back a wholly unexpected and impressive balance to the head office. His record was sufficiently outstanding to make him the logical choice for manager of the New York office.

He took over this responsibility and acquitted himself for two years with notable success. But now his uncle, who had undergone a major operation, was aging and unwell; there was no prospect that he could continue as head of the business a great while longer. Warren realized this and had no wish to work for his uncle's son, a cousin who was being brought along to succeed the founder. Warren and the cousin were naturally as incompatible as last year and next.

Warren looked around for a chance to get into business for himself, and before long he found it. He made a partnership agreement with a young man he liked, and the two obtained enough financial backing to start their own firm. They became wholesalers of cotton textiles and also acquired a small specialty mill.

Warren's old talent for running things was still sharp. His business went ahead steadily. He ran the sales end, built up an effective sales force, and also took charge of the buying. After a while he got his eye on a good mill man and put him in charge of the specialty mill. As years passed, the enterprise developed successfully, even beyond any hopes Warren and his partner could have had for it.

He achieved an important standing in the industry, was elected head of a national trade association, served as chairman of various committees, and won respect as a member of several societies, one

or two of them professional, the others more general. And all this time liquor had been no problem. He had been a normal drinker and never anything more or anything less.

Now, well past fifty years of age, with no conceivable reason, he began to be a dependent drinker. To me he described his experience in these words: "It creeps right up on you before you realize. You know it's getting worse but you keep on telling yourself you can manage it.

"You are impatient with your wife when she tries to help you. You lose your temper and accuse her of nagging. This cockeyed alcoholic thing—your wife says something about your drinking, and deliberately you walk out of the house and go to the nearest saloon and finish the job. You stay out until two in the morning and then you come home drunk.

"You go on for years with this uncontrolled drinking, still refusing to admit it to anyone else. You try to do all kinds of things. You go to hospitals, psychiatrists, sanitariums, and so on, one after another, trying to find out how to stop.

"You want to stop, but probably in the back of your mind you have the thought of trying to learn to drink normally again, though every place you go they tell you you can't. You come out of these places and are drunk again in no time."

When Warren went home to visit his mother—he usually stayed with her two or three days—he did not drink. Mrs. Fulbright was a devoted member of the W. C. T. U. and had been president of her local organization. Warren's sisters knew of his drinking, and one of them, catching him at home in one of these sober intervals, urged him to go to a private sanitarium specializing in the treatment of hard drinkers.

"I had wonderful food and exercise," Warren told me. "They put me on my feet—but their whole treatment had been aimed at curing me of a bad habit. I can't think of a single dent they made in me, though they kept digging into my past to try to find out why I had become an uncontrolled drinker. They got nowhere. Of course that was fifteen years ago, and such places have probably learned a great deal since.

"Another time I was in a hospital in New York for three weeks until they said, 'You're cured.' Yet before I reached the railroad station to buy my ticket home, I was drunk again. Why? Why, coming out of that hospital, would I go into a saloon and buy myself a drink?

"The only explanation I can offer is that, without being aware of the fact, I had a disease that had affected my nervous system so that the minute I was free I rushed to have a drink—rushed into that bar unconsciously. You see, I had had no cure or offset for my disease. I had no method for avoiding that drink.

"Doctors, ministers, books—none had any effect on the disease. The so-called cure had done nothing but put me in better physical condition without changing my tendency to feel the need of a drink as soon as possible. After the first drink, the disease really got to work. In twenty minutes or half an hour the craving struck. I had to have another drink. My nerves were shouting for it.

"In a situation like that, you don't intend to get drunk. You're just quieting your nerves."

Warren was told about a man in Boston who was having some success with uncontrolled drinkers. His name was Lathrop and he was a Harvard man—"a brilliant, dynamic personality"—who had himself become a dependent drinker of the most extreme kind. A doctor had worked with him and straightened him out, for the time at any rate. This doctor, Warren said, had asked Lathrop what he intended to do with his life. Lathrop had independent means and no special occupation. At the moment he couldn't answer the doctor's question.

"Why don't you open an office and see what you can do to help other alcoholics?" the doctor went on, elaborating this suggestion with some detail. The idea appealed to Lathrop and, with the doctor's professional help, he went ahead.

"In other words," Warren told me, "he made a profession of showing alcoholics how to overcome their bad habits. He worked on this theory: he prepared a series of little daily lessons on the progress of drinking—I believe there were eighty-four of them eventually. He wrote a book.

"I went up to Boston to consult him. The first time I stayed two weeks. I saw him in his office every morning for an hour, and he talked to me. He went over my drinking career, bringing out things that tempt us to drink to excess, and making suggestions as to how to overcome this kind of thing.

"He advised a change of old habits and a change of environment. He also suggested ways to offset the desire for a drink. For instance, you're busy all day and you feel tired. At four o'clock you go out and get some cocktails or highballs. Lathrop suggested having chocolate in your pocket and eating it so that, by taking this sweet stuff, you would spoil your taste for drinking. He also advised his patients to have hobbies and outside interests.

"He was successful up to a point, but most of his patients went back to drinking. Why did he fail? In the first place, Lathrop never realized that alcoholism was a disease. He never insisted that alcoholics could do nothing unless they acknowledged this and their helplessness to control their own lives.

"In the second place, he spent weeks and weeks on the power of will but made no reference to any greater power, to the spiritual side of life.

"In the third place, he missed the alcoholic's necessity of *getting out of himself*. He said, 'Get yourself a hobby.' He did not say, 'Get out of yourself. Become interested in other alcoholics. Listen to their problems. Try to help them.' He missed the twelfth step."

This "twelfth step" of Alcoholics Anonymous is to be discussed later. Warren Fulbright was putting weighty emphasis upon it.

"The alcoholic," he went on, "is the damndest introvert God ever put on earth. Wheels are going around in his head all the time—I—I—I. He's wrapped up in his own troubles. He never really thinks of anyone but himself. He picks the most critical and important and sensitive times to get drunk.

"I kept on with Lathrop for eleven months, making trips to Boston to see him, and at last he said, 'You've done well. You won't have any more trouble. Go back home and get yourself a hobby.' I went back home and inside of a month I was drunk again.

"As for Lathrop, he opened an office in New York. He had been

sober for twenty years but in New York for some reason he decided to take the first drink. After that he rounded up a lot of his unsuccessful patients and went on a hell of a bender, the damndest bender that was ever heard of. He didn't stop drinking uncontrollably and in six months he was dead of alcoholism."

So here was Warren Fulbright, drunk and back just about where he had started. He had plenty of money to keep on drinking, instead of winding up in doorways and alleys as so many alcoholics do, for his executives kept the business running. An exceedingly able and loyal secretary, who had been with him almost from the start, was always on hand to lie for him and to cover up his alcoholic lapses as well as possible.

What was the matter with Warren? Why had he, an active, successful man of affairs, the head of a prosperous business, plainly more intelligent than most men, gifted with more common sense and experience, become a hopeless alcoholic? Why had he launched himself into uncontrolled drinking after the age of fifty, after years during which liquor had been no problem?

One thing is certain. This did happen, and once Warren was fairly embarked, all his experience, education, and intelligence went for nothing. He was no better, no worse, no different from any of the alcoholics of high or low degree.

Had he not tried everything open to the habitual drunk who sincerely wishes to save himself?

His experience with Lathrop was a closed chapter and he was again drinking regularly and excessively when a woman friend of the family said to him, "Warren, will you do something for us? Will you come to dinner with us Friday night—and will you promise to come sober?"

"All right, Ella," he said. "I will."

The promise was easier to make than to keep. Warren had a grim time leaving liquor alone until Friday night came, and for a while the chances were not much more than even that he would last through. But he did, and after dinner a fellow guest, who turned out to have been one of the early members of Alcoholics Anonymous, talked to him of his own experience and of the experience of

others. Obviously, Warren had been talked to before. He had, as they say, been talked to by experts. But he had never listened to another alcoholic who had been through the obsession and suffering and all the rest, and who had achieved sobriety. What he heard now was precisely in terms of his own thinking and acting. The thing that proved most important to him was the discovery that alcoholism is a disease and, since this is true, that his whole struggle against drinking had been largely a going around in circles. He had never been out of the worn and beaten alcoholic track. He had never encountered the one break in the pattern.

Sometime during the previous year he had read the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, but apparently he had not absorbed much. At least, it had not become real to him.

As this evening ended, there was no indication that anything more significant had happened. His fellow guest had applied no pressure, exacted no promises, tried no persuasion. True, Warren knew a good deal more about A. A. than he had read in the book, but all his new friend said was, "If you're interested, call me up." "If you're interested, call me up."

These simple words spoken in a friendly way were to change Warren's life. After a few days, he telephoned to his fellow guest of the dinner party. That was eleven years ago, and Warren has not had a drink since.

Bitter Fruit

Warren Fulbright would have done for me, if he could, what an experienced friend had done for him, but I was not ready. His approach put me off.

I struggled through a year or two longer, without hope but stubbornly refusing to admit that I had no hope. Outwardly the experiences of these months were not much different from earlier ones, but they did cut the pattern ominously deeper and deeper.

I did not stage for myself such a dramatic scene as a man who later became a friend of mine, Marty Tobin.

Marty was a man of engaging presence, somewhat younger than I, who had taken his first drink at the age of fourteen. He thinks now that he was a problem drinker from the start, that with his per-

sonality and background he never had a chance to drink normally. By "background" in this instance I do not mean a lack of wholesome influences in the home, or of other advantages of many kinds; I mean a sort of sensitivity of the kind that enables some men to become artists, some poets, and some engineers. The making of an alcoholic is a subtle thing too.

Marty developed a great deal of ability as he grew older. He had the gift of making friends. His imagination was of a kind that looks ahead and arrives at a sound appraisal of the results of a particular idea. After holding down a few jobs and getting ahead steadily, he went into trade journal work and owned a publication with a good field that seemed just the thing for him.

But he was an alcoholic and he could not escape the familiar sequence of excessive drinking in the afternoon and at night, then drinking in the morning, then living from drink to drink. All this was in spite of the fact that he had a wife and children, and that he wanted, as alcoholics generally do, to be utterly different.

A time came when he was in such a state that he convinced himself he was becoming insane. Complete madness stared him in the face, and the only thing to do was to go away where he would not be an affliction to his family. He decided to head for California, but first he must say a final farewell to Lily, his wife. Everything was in order, all arrangements were made, and he dropped into a hotel to telephone to her, almost choked with the emotion of this crisis in his life. The day happened to be a hot one, the hotel bar was at hand, and he took a drink to steady himself.

The first drink, as always, demanded others. Instead of embarking for California, he floundered home to Lily late that night, drunk and oblivious. Once again an alcoholic had missed the boat—or, if not the boat this time, at least the train.

The tragedy of Marty's experience did not lie in its obvious histrionics, but in the fact that from the alcoholic point of view or from that of understanding alcoholism, they were not histrionics at all. Deep within the play-acting of this experience was hidden a very terrible reality, a part of the unending plight and struggle of the alcoholic.

As I have said. I was spared such a scene as this, or in some se-

cret way I spared myself, just as I did not come to the suicide attempts that not a few alcoholics, in their agony and desperation, undertake. So awful sometimes is the psychic and physical suffering and the hopelessness, that slashed wrists seem the best way out.

Still short of final desperation, I made up my mind to go to A. A. meetings. As always, Alice helped me. She was by my side.

Alcoholics Anonymous

I cannot describe accurately the first meeting, but I will describe one of them.

At eight-thirty in the evening the parish house door is open and a nearby streetlight makes a spattering pattern of shadow through the branches of sycamore maple trees. The sounds of the town, never rising to any volume in the evening, seem distant, as if they had retreated.

Many groups of A. A. meet in hotels or in rooms or halls that are plainly neutral ground, free from any thought of sectarianism or, in fact, of religious or doctrinal influence, but in our town this parish house is the pleasantest and most convenient place, and the undeviating independence of A. A. is so well recognized that the meeting ground makes no difference. The room is pine-paneled, the ceiling rises in a pitch overhead. Chairs are arranged down the middle of the floor, from the platform, which is not used, to the entrance, so that two rows face each other. It's an informal, comfortable way to sit. There are plenty of ash trays, and in a small kitchen off at one side the women will have coffee ready at the proper time.

The members of the group and their guests—anyone who is troubled with a problem of alcoholism—drop in gradually and stand or sit about talking; and finally they are all seated. There are almost as many wives as men, and some of the women are alcoholics.

Somebody must start the meeting. Jim MacIntyre hasn't run a meeting lately, so he starts it. He is a strongly built man still in the vigorous period of his life. At first glance his face does not seem expressive but if you watch him a little while you see the quick responses to what is going on, and the shrewd judgments that are being formed behind his eyes.

"My wife says I'm an alcoholic," he says with a quick smile. To mimic their old rationalizations is one of the ways an A. A. can underline his present realism.

He goes on: "Just for a change, let's begin by seeing if there are any questions tonight. Anyone got any questions to ask to start the ball rolling?"

No one seemed to have a question at that moment.

"All right," says Jim, matter-of-factly. "What have you got for us tonight, Herb? Is it too soon to call on you?"

"No, I don't think so," says Herb. He puts down his pipe. Herb is a man with gray hair at the temples. He's well built but a different type from Jim. You'd say he had been out of doors a good bit but on the whole he appears the intellectual or professional type.

"I've been thinking," Herb goes on, "that one of the things that has meant most to me in A. A. is freedom. You know, I've always disliked restraints—restraints of any kind. It was an important discovery for me when I realized that A. A., far from imposing any restraints on me, was actually setting me free. When I was drinking, I had no freedom at all. I was tied up every minute of every day."

Herb elaborates on this theme, and it is obviously not a casual notion or a play upon words, but something he has thought out carefully. He is trying earnestly to contrast an emancipation, actual and literal, that he has achieved after years of bondage to alcohol. Now that he is dry, as the phrase goes, he does not have to worry about liquor. It isn't that he can't take a drink—it is that he *does not have to take a drink* as for so many years he did. He's his own man now. He's not suffering from any compulsion at all.

"That's very good, Herb," says Jim, and he looks along the rows of faces to see who looks ripe for the next remarks. "Charlie, how about you?"

"No, Jim," says Charlie, "I'm just going to pass tonight."

"All right." Before Jim can call on anyone else, a stranger speaks up. He was introduced around, before the meeting opened, as a Mr. Williams. He owns a house in town but is not widely known. He has a question, but he states it first in the form of a problem.

"I have a drinking problem," he says, "and my wife tells me to come to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. I've been to some in New York. Sometimes when I take a few more drinks than I've planned to, I find that the next morning my wife and my children don't want to have anything to do with me. It's a dreadful feeling to realize that you've made yourself so disgusting that your family can't put up with you."

Mr. Williams explains that most times when something of this sort happens, he is not really aware he has been drunk. He drinks in the evening and nothing out of the way registers in his mind; in the morning he has no hangover, no realization of having been drunk. But from his family's attitude he learns what has happened and is seriously concerned.

Jim takes this as easy grist to the A. A. mill. Alcoholics know all about experiences such as that described by Mr. Williams. He observes, "One thing the gentleman said struck me especially. He spoke about taking more drinks than he had planned to. Most of us alcoholics have had to learn that we can't take any drinks at all."

Jim hasn't slapped the new man down, but he has laid the fact neatly and gently on the line. How soon Mr. Williams will digest this is uncertain. If he continues to go to A. A. meetings he will probably hear this same thing put in many different ways. When you get drunk without knowing it, and your behavior is such that your wife and children are revolted, you seem to be a man who ought not to drink—probably one who can't drink without going the whole alcoholic way. After all, Mr. Williams has had this unsettling experience a number of times—how many times he hasn't said, and perhaps has been unwilling to say. Instead of controlling his drinking, which apparently he is unable or unready to do, he has come to A. A. for an answer. He gets an answer, not only from Jim but from others.

"As to your wife and children turning away from you," Jim goes on, "a good many of us have had that experience. What do you say, George?"

"I know all about that," says George, a tall, slender young man who now holds his cigarette reflectively. "I don't think anyone here

has had more problems from drinking than I have. It got so bad that I lost my wife and kids for two weeks—I didn't care at the time. I was so drunk I was glad to see them go.

"I was putting away a fifth every day. Oh, I could get around all right and I don't suppose most people knew I was drunk unless I started to talk."

George tells how his wife and two small boys left him, and how he got them back. "The thing is," he says, "that if you will sober up, they'll come back to you. I know what it is to have my kids afraid to bring their friends to the house because they don't know what shape the old man will be in. I've been through that."

George tells something of his experience like a man exhaling a deep breath. He's not supplying a story; he's holding up a real part of his life, turning it to catch the clear light, examining it from all sides. The only thing that did him any good in the long run was A. A.

"I've heard later," he remarks, "that Warren Fulbright was chasing around trying to locate me. If he'd caught up with me, I'd probably have come to A. A. and quit drinking sooner."

One by one, without seeming to have any special plan in mind, Jim MacIntyre calls on alcoholics who have something to contribute for the information and benefit of Mr. Williams. Everything at once becomes closely relevant; a picture of general experience emerges into which Mr. Williams may look as into a mirror. If he does not do so now, perhaps he will later. Or at some future A. A. meeting the clear view may come.

Then the talk veers. Eddie Neece, an occasional visitor to this group, speaks of the spiritual meaning of A. A. to him. He refers to "the Man Upstairs," and apparently he does this because it is a help to speak of the idea of God as less formal and distant and organized—less frightening—than sometimes the idea has been. The reverence is not in the name but in the fact. Eddie has stopped trying to be a god for himself, with alcohol as the main driving force, and the inspiration of a higher power has provided a fresh fullness for his life.

He goes on to tell a story. After he had stopped drinking, he was

out with some friends and went into a saloon with them. He was backward about saying bluntly that he had discovered himself to be an alcoholic, and somewhat sheepishly he ordered ginger ale. His friends jumped on him for an explanation and he finally said simply, "I'm an A. A."

The bartender looked at him in a friendly way and asked, "What group do you belong to? I belong to the East Orange group."

There is, of course, a general laugh. But Eddie's purpose in telling the story is serious. He says, "Many of my friends drink without doing themselves any harm. They enjoy it and they know how to handle it. I certainly wouldn't deprive them of the pleasure. If I could stop the sale of all alcoholic beverages in the country tomorrow, I wouldn't do it."

There is a thin, trim-figured woman in slacks about half way of the row where most of the A. A. wives are sitting. It's hard to tell how old she is. She has a look of fitness and vigor about her and when Jim calls on her she speaks well and without self-consciousness.

"I can say that I was only drunk twice in my life," she says. "That was from the time I was sixteen to the time I was eighteen, and from the time I was nineteen until I was thirty-nine."

The A. A.'s know the essentials of her remarkable story already, but what she says now is different and with shifts of emphasis that make her points fresh and thought-provoking. She got drunk as a young girl, quit drinking perforce for a year when she was with her family, began again and survived two of her drinking friends who died tragically. She was thrown out of the nursing profession for alcoholism, was looked upon as a poor chance for help by A. A., had to be accompanied to and from the meetings to be sure she would arrive and return home sober. But now she is as attractive and penetrating as we see her here, an eloquent but concise speaker, a realist.

"You don't have to get A. A.," she says. "It gets you."

"Thank you, Nora," says Jim with a slight extra emphasis in his voice. Nora holds everyone's respect. After her years of complete alcoholism, it is hard to see how she has accomplished what she

has. After her remark about A. A., the talk turns to this subject.

"You don't have to worry about how it works," says someone. "The thing is that if you keep coming to the meetings, you do stop drinking. Sooner or later something comes out or someone says something that fits you."

Then Jim calls on young Timmie Sloan. Maybe he'll have some thought about A. A. His last bender was only two months back, and he's new in A. A. But Timmie's mind has been running in another direction. He's been thinking about his own life in relation to alcoholism.

"Most of you probably remember my father," he says, "and you know he was an alcoholic. That was the home where I was brought up. I remember when I was afraid to go to basketball games for fear my father would be there . . ."

Timmie is not making an appeal for sympathy. He's trying to reconstruct a story that alcoholics will understand. He's working on his own case in the terms common to A. A., looking ahead toward a solution, an adjustment.

While he was in high school, Timmie began drinking beer. He didn't drink all the time but often he drank a good deal. It all depended on whether beer was easy to get or whether it was scarce. Later he went into the Army and from then on he drank just about everything when opportunity offered.

After his Army service he went to college under the G. I. bill, but his drinking didn't go well with education. He was always running into debt and barely managing to square himself when he got a remittance. Finally the business of drinking and borrowing was run out too thin and he was asked to leave.

"And now I'm a fisherman," he says, "and I guess that's a drinker's delight—you go outside for a couple of weeks and you can't drink, then you come in for a while and you can drink all the time."

There is a general laugh at this summation of the fisherman situation, but Chris Perry announces genially, "I resent that." Chris is a fisherman who has been in A. A. successfully for several years after a long experience of alcoholism. Some time ago he went into

the bars of the neighboring city where he used to drink and told the bartenders not to sell him anything more because he was an alcoholic. Timmie is here under his tutelage and everyone thinks Timmie is going to make the grade. Incidentally, Timmie is married to a young and exceedingly attractive dark-haired wife and she is here in one of the chairs opposite.

Now Mr. Williams, the stranger to the group, makes an observation that is half question. At a meeting of A. A. in New York, he says, he was shocked to discover that there were men who did not believe in a Supreme Being, and he thinks A. A. is doing a great thing in bringing such men to realize that there is indeed a Supreme Being.

"Can I say something?" says Marty Tobin. "I'd like to disagree with our friend here. It's my idea that A. A. isn't trying to get anyone to accept belief in a Supreme Being or anything else. The A. A. program is strictly cafeteria style—you take what you can use."

The theme is to Marty's liking and he speaks earnestly and effectively. He has a point here that comes close to the heart of A. A. "You take what you can use." He speaks of his own experience with the spiritual side of life before and after he stopped drinking. "I used to pray to God," he says, "and I prayed fervently too. I would go into church and kneel and beseech God to help me stop drinking, but I got drunk just the same. I learned that it was no use to expect God to strike the bottle from my hand when I lifted it to take a drink. We all have to learn that. No such thing is going to happen. We can't get rid of our problem that way by handing it over to God—we've got to *do something ourselves*."

"One of the most important things I've learned is that the A. A. program is an action program. It's an action program all the way. In my own case, I find that I need the whole program all the time. I need to read A. A. literature. I need to go to meetings, and I need the twelfth step work.

"I never leave one of the alcoholics I've been working with, even those with whom I am most unsuccessful—and there are some I know will never stop drinking because they're out and out dipsos—

without feeling a profound sense of gratitude to them for the help they give me in maintaining my own sobriety.

"I also need the spiritual side. I need God's help. There is no day when I don't get up in the morning and pray God to help me to keep sober through that day, and thank Him in the evening for His aid. It's up to me, and with God's help I keep sober one day at a time.

"In a few weeks now I will have been three complete years without taking a drink, and to me that's pretty remarkable. I was a hopeless alcoholic for fifteen years, and I guess that in my early A. A. days I was looked upon as one of the least reliable figures in the group. Under the circumstances it is no wonder that my sobriety is very precious to me and I am willing to work at it."

Marty's talk is more detailed than this summary suggests. In particular he is successful in showing the difference between a one-sided religious concept, and that in which the individual assumes and sustains an active part, seeking to be an instrument of God's will, not merely a beneficiary of God's help in a time of personal surrender.

He goes on now to speak of three axioms of A. A.— clichés, he calls them, and remarks that they irritate some people.

"'First things first.' That means to me that alcoholism is my biggest problem in life and I must keep this fact in mind. If I can handle this problem, nothing else will be so very bad. Then there's the next one, 'Easy does it.' This means patience. What I have torn down in fifteen years I can't hope or expect to build up again overnight. I've got to have this in mind and bear with it, and work steadily for the long pull. And the last is 'Live and let live.' To me this means that I can't afford resentments."

There is more of Marty's talk, and at the end many of his phrases stand out as if they were illuminated: ". . . strictly cafeteria style, you take what you can use . . . an action program all the way . . . I keep sober one day at a time."

"Thanks, Marty," says Jim MacIntyre, "and now, Walter, do you want to close the meeting?"

Walter Burdick, a thoughtful, prepossessing man of middle years

who obviously has the respect of everyone, speaks thoughtfully of the relationship between man and alcoholism, of the ways in which alcoholics may be reached, of the road all the members of the group are traveling. What he says is suggestive, full of ideas. For instance, he observes that intelligence is not the most likely aid to the alcoholic who seeks to stop drinking. The intellect, in effect, is a prejudiced witness. It has stood between the alcoholic and the truth, helped to rationalize and evade, and what is needed now is an ultimate recognition more basic than one man's efforts at reason.

Then he says, "Perhaps it will be a good idea if we read the Twelve Steps. We haven't had them for quite a while now."

Walter reads the Twelve Steps of the A. A., a suggested program, not a prescribed regimen, in his temperate voice that so much carries conviction, and after that all rise and repeat in unison the Lord's Prayer. The meeting is over, the sound of dishes begins to drift from the kitchen, and the women circulate with cups of coffee, sandwiches, and cookies.

The A. A. members and their guests sit about informally to talk, some about problems of alcoholism and their own experiences, some about unrelated matters that happen to be interesting. One member admits his dog, a raggedy and amiable companion, who has been kept outside in the car. The atmosphere is relaxed and gentle, the voices weave a sociable pattern but something more than that, for here is a fellowship that plainly follows a many-sided intention. This has been just one meeting of a series of many that started somewhere else long ago and is due to run on into the future as the Purpose accompanies and keeps pace and opens vistas ahead.

To a stranger, such an evening's meeting might seem a strange instance of a discussion group—what can one say of a club that meets and instead of talking of Modern Farming or Democracy in Europe or Draperies in the Home, takes for its subject the personal lives of the members, not omitting shame, failure, and weakness?

But the point is that the A. A. is not a discussion group at all. Its meeting is a workshop. It is a workshop not by figure of speech but in fact. Those who have been gathered in the parish house this

evening, led by Jim MacIntyre, have worked at their own destinies and the destinies of others. They have worked in the only way possible. Self consciousness, false pride, and pretense have been left behind long ago, for the hammer of truth will ring only on real metal.

Indestructible Humanity

I found the A. A. meetings to be a continuing workshop, and rather like the visible part of the proverbial iceberg which carries most of its bulk out of sight, beneath the surface. In the case of the meetings, the hidden mass consists on the one hand of all the years of alcoholism—perhaps 150 years of drinking underlying the meeting I have described—and on the other hand the dynamism in the present lives of the group. It would be impossible to grasp the significance of the meetings without an awareness of the active purpose in these several lives.

The Twelve Steps, as Walter Burdick read them, are as follows:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our con-

scious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and practice these principles in all our affairs.

These Twelve Steps have been summarized in the form of five major principles: admission of alcoholism, personality analysis and catharsis, adjustment of personal relations, dependence upon a higher power, and working with other alcoholics. And the five principles, in turn, have been equated with the methods of medicine on the one hand and of religion on the other (in an address delivered by an A. A. spokesman before the annual meeting of the Medical Society of the State of New York, Section on Neurology and Psychiatry, in 1944).

Medicine, said this spokesman, would require: a personality change, a full and honest mental catharsis, elimination of serious "personality defects" through accurate self knowledge and realistic adjustment to life, and, in view of the alcoholic neurotic's anxiety, abnormal self concern, and withdrawal from the "herd," a return to the "herd" and discovery of "a new compelling interest in life."

Religion would require: a change of heart or spiritual awakening, an examination of conscience followed by confession and a moral inventory, elimination of character defects or sins through more honesty, humility, unselfishness, tolerance, generosity, love, and so on, and in view of the alcoholic's fear, self-centredness and self-seeking, a renewal of faith with works, a love of serving both man and God.

"How does it work, anyway?" asks an A. A. member at a meeting. When the question is discussed, the result is the same as with many another question—the group doesn't agree. One man hasn't taken much to the Twelve Steps; he says that with him the group therapy is the main thing. No one insists on the Twelve Steps, in fact no one insists on anything.

"You don't get it—it gets you. If you keep on coming to meetings, somehow or other you stay sober."

But there is a great deal that may be said, beyond the sugges-

tions of medicine and religion, or more or less paralleling them, as to the working of A. A. For one thing, A. A. recognizes, more than that, insists upon, the indestructibility of the human spirit. It finds even after degradation, physical ruin, social rejection and contempt—these and all the other aspects of alcoholic disgrace and failure—the still-remaining truth of God-in-man.

If the individual has been driven by pain and despair, A. A. offers him a relationship in which pain and despair do not count. There is no reproach he can make of himself that these others have not already faced. They perceive and acknowledge something he has long forgotten, his dignity. They offer him a common bond, a friendship in which there is no pretense and no need or occasion for justification. The single ultimate justification that could ever be asked of him he already has. He is a man. His humanity, though so pitifully masked, is as great and important now as ever.

This Day

So much is completely intangible, and so is the fact that A. A. offers to the lost alcoholic the gift of something he has been doing without, something he sorely needs. A. A. offers him the gift of TODAY, the PRESENT, the NOW that makes life real.

The alcoholic is an individual who has never, at least during his drinking career, lived completely in the present day. Part of the essential nature of his affliction is that he evades and escapes his problems, and he does this most easily by withdrawing into the past or projecting himself into the future.

A. A. teaches the principle of living one day at a time. Tomorrow, the A. A. member is apt to say, I may go on the most amazing bender you ever saw, but today I will remain sober. Often the new members live not a day at a time, but ten or twenty minutes at a time, facing only the immediate, urgent present. The vital instant of decision is NOW. If I can conquer NOW, I will be satisfied, let all the future minutes and hours and days come as they will.

At first impression, perhaps, especially for a cynical or badly frightened alcoholic, this may seem a bleak sort of resolution, or a device for fooling oneself, for hiding the awful prospect of a life

without alcohol. It may seem a deploying of an endless series of bare, Spartan moments of self-denial. But in truth it is none of these.

The business of living in the present alone is not a gimmick or a device, but a healing re-orientation that has the profoundest implications and results. Through this principle the alcoholic exchanges fantasy for realism, false promise for truth, waste for realization. He begins to accept at last a deliberate and honest relationship with life.

Days that are not lived are lost. By failing to live so many days, the alcoholic loses a great span of life. Once each day is lived for itself, with increasing serenity and satisfaction, a wholeness of life begins to take shape, and then the future rises on the horizon with freshness and honest expectancy.

Marty Tobin heard his two children, a boy and a girl, talking.

"Will we go to the movies Saturday night? I hope we will," said the girl.

"Don't worry about that," replied her brother. "In this house we live one day at a time."

Knowledge

Intangible but in no way mystical is the fact that the A. A. groups represent the most practical concentrations of knowledge about alcoholism that exist today. Surely if a man has a grave problem involving his own personality and conduct, the first logical step is to learn as much as possible about it. For information as to some maladies it is necessary or advisable to travel long distances for consultation in certain centers of research, but the whole grasp of alcoholism may be available, without fee, in the next block.

The causes of alcoholism have not been established to the satisfaction of psychiatrists and physicians, though specialists say that it is often a neurotic response pattern, or a reaction to strong social stress or injury to the psyche. In some instances it may be nutritional. Yet, speaking before a meeting of the World Federation for Mental Health not long ago, Dr. Elvin M. Jellinek, one of the foremost authorities, said it was amazing how little is known about

drinking patterns. Dr. Jellinek has been referred to before. He is director of the School of Alcoholic Studies at Yale and has many other important affiliations in this whole field.

Research into the ultimate nature and origins of alcoholism is a technical and professional task, but this is not the sort of knowledge that immediately concerns most individual alcoholics. While the research continues, the alcoholics must know about themselves, where they are, and where they are going. And this is the sort of information an A. A. meeting delivers.

It is information drawn from experience and expressed with complete articulateness in the idiom all alcoholics know, the idiom in which they are interested. Luckily, no matter how they have become that way, alcoholics run true to form in behavior. They resort to the same tricks and subterfuges with which to fool themselves and others. No matter how resourceful and ingenious they have considered themselves, for instance, they discover from A. A. that countless alcoholics before them have hidden bottles in the same ingenious places. Here is a symbol close to the heart of the malady of alcoholism: where do you hide the bottles?

All in all, the evidence is too plain to doubt. However the different individuals came by it, their alcoholism is the same disease. Early or late, each must find—if he regains this much of normality—that his experience has joined the main stream of typical and unvarying alcoholic behavior.

But no one can have this full realization, or a grasp of all the tricks of behavior, the compulsions, the physical sensations, the inner complexity and entire nature of alcoholism, unless he himself is an alcoholic. Those who look on from the outside can see a great deal, but full understanding is impossible.

The inside knowledge which is brought out and analyzed at A. A. meetings, or between A. A. members in a hospital room or elsewhere, is a unique sharing. If one wants to use long words he may call it a therapeutic mutuality.

And of course this shared experience and knowledge, though it misses a good deal in theory—as the doctors still do—is always practical. The heads of alcoholics are usually in the clouds, but

here their feet are on the ground, good, solid ground. Good intentions alone are at a discount. Nothing works except what works, and between them any group of alcoholics will have tried about everything.

Society and I

For the alcoholic there has come to be an increasingly unequal separation of categories in the world in which he tries to exist—until finally on the one hand is society and on the other is—I, the *I* of alcoholism, the indwelling, brooding, conspiring ego. Or, in other words, the alcoholic is a person without the social context that should belong to any man or woman. He is a page torn out of a book. Much as he may pretend otherwise, he is lonely, withdrawn, lost.

His withdrawal is part of his unhappiness, for the alcoholic—and this cannot be said too often—is an unhappy man, an incomplete man not only by reason of his own unrealized possibilities of character and spirit, but also by reason of his exclusion from the society of his fellow human beings.

Others have pointed out that Alcoholics Anonymous provides for the obsessed drinker a companionship, a society, into which he is made welcome. Since he has suffered for the lack of exactly this natural requisite of his gregarious kind, his absorption into a fellowship is naturally a curative and restorative step.

But A. A. provides something more than the bare fact of a social group; it provides a particular sort of society offering greater rewards than the alcoholic has knowingly sought among his fellow men. He has tried vainly to bring the world into balance through drinking; now he sees at last where the balance lies.

This new social group, as he finds it, is one of plain speaking and no pretense.

It is without disgrace. No one is at all interested in having himself appear better (or not so bad) as someone else. The alcoholic experience, a joint affair after all and peculiar to no one, is taken as one thing only—as *fact*, fact resulting from a malady in which intelligence, will-power, love of family and all the rest have been

not only unavailing but *entirely beside the point*, a malady, therefore, neither moral nor ethical in its charted course.

This new social group is also one of mutual helpfulness, in which the strength of the group is identified with the strength of the individual, as if he had a different sort of bank account to draw upon.

It is a social group in which everyone knows that what the future holds will be better than the past, and better without alcohol than it ever could have been with alcohol. This common viewpoint becomes a strong tie.

It is a social group of freedom and individualism, in which there is no discipline except the self-imposed discipline—*not to take a drink today*.

It is a social group of dynamism in which there is always something to do that is worth doing. The challenge to purpose, reflection, and achievement is continuing, and the Twelfth Step pattern of helping other alcoholics is a constant suggestion of a working principle which can be applied through all the byways and thoroughfares of life.

My Own Master

"We're a pretty undisciplined bunch," Marty Tobin says.

"I've always disliked restraints," says Herb Mason.

Yet Marty and Herb, as all A. A.'s do, came into the group by the First Step, an admission of surrender. "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable." The surrender involved humility, a strange state of mind for the alcoholic, and humility grew with the other steps and with the stock-taking and mutual examination of A. A. Yet, in the end, not Marty nor Herb nor any of the others were diminished as individuals. On the contrary, their importance as human beings was magnified and increased—at last it found full scope, and therefore it found freedom too.

The wheels that are going around in the alcoholic's head, as Warren Fulbright puts it, the absorption with I—I—I, are a narrowing and confining business. All ego-centricity is narrowing, belittling, confining, and what ego-centric can surpass the alcoholic?

A man does not ask himself, "Do you prefer to be important to yourself, in your own mind alone, or important as a member of the human race in free circulation, the common currency of the human kind?" If he is an alcoholic, most of all, he is aware of only one kind of importance, a magnification of his own concerns, and he is not aware of the paradox that as he waits upon and seeks to elevate his own ego, it becomes as narrow as a sheet of paper, with no more weight, as lightly held.

But the other half of the paradox holds good too, and as he forgets his tight absorption in and with himself, he regains what otherwise he must have lost forever.

The A. A., having made the surrender that he once looked upon as a measure of despair, defeat, and abasement, having drawn upon the strength of the group, and having accepted the help of a higher power, becomes fully his own master, it may well be for the first time. He becomes what a human being was intended to be.

The A. A.'s subscribe to no rules, accept no regimen. They take what they can use, as Marty Tobin puts it. They disagree frequently and completely, often on matters relating to alcoholism. They carry the consciousness of free men.

As a practical matter, they know that humility is important because the alcoholic who loses humility will begin drinking again, no matter how long his disease has been arrested. They have seen this happen time and again. They are not likely to forget such a fundamental principle. But real humility, after all, is not a restraint but a kind of poise like that of an athlete whose muscles are relaxed and whose movements are free and unimpeded by bad adjustments and nervous tensions.

Emotional Maturity

Living in the present, if it does not require emotional maturity, at least forms an active training school for this vital growth of the individual. A. A. deals in maturity.

The subject is not always understood, but it is not clouded in mystery. A man sitting on the floor playing with his children at some child's game is not emotionally immature. He is giving his companionship as an adult can, looking at the activity and pleasure

of the children with an appreciative and grown-up point of view.

But when a man flies into a temper as a child does, even if his tantrum is disguised and justified by some tirade of words that are supposed to be reasonable, he is betraying emotional immaturity. The responses of children are primitive and natural. As they develop and grow up, the young of the human race acquire the ability to accept social restraints, to adjust their aims and their behavior to a real world rather than one of fantasy, to become members of larger groups than the family, and so on. But in not a few individuals the adjustments of adulthood do not come, or do not come fully.

Hidden, of course, and all unacknowledged, these individuals still cherish the desire to follow those primitive, natural ways of childhood. Petulance, guilt, involved courses of justification or extenuation, resentment, excessive sentimentality, evasions, fantasies—these are often childish expressions, and they loom large in alcoholic behavior because the alcoholic has often sought liquor as a means of seeming to achieve an adjustment he refuses or fails to make in actual terms. When this private world of the alcoholic is opened up, it turns out not to have been a private world after all, but one shared throughout the whole range of alcoholism.

When it is exposed and when such an artificial aid to its existence as alcohol is eliminated, the grown-up day begins to arrive at last. This is something to be welcomed, not to be feared. For the mature individual has all the resources of music, art, books, sport, and the various crafts through which to work out the needs that disguised immaturity, so often aided by alcohol, forced into tortuous and painful channels.

Once again it may be repeated, days that are not lived are lost. The past is irrevocably gone, the future remains ahead, but today is here. Not only am I my own master, but I rise in the morning as an adult human being, unafraid. This day is a part of me, and I am a part of this day.

The Crippled Personality

When the alcoholic accepts the surrender of the First Step in A. A.. which in the long run is not a surrender at all, he

acknowledges an incomplete or crippled personality. But something more should be said of this, for personality must be judged largely in relationship to society and environment—which means to the world in which modern man lives his years.

The modern world is not the natural world. Its complex structure, the elaborate routines of daily life, the sanctions and pressures of civilization make demands upon the resources of the individual that were never made in human history before. Thus the alcoholic's inadequacy is not an inherent defect but simply, or not so simply, an inadequacy in respect to the role in which—it may be with unconscious unwillingness—he finds himself cast.

Perhaps he shrinks from the strains and rigors which appalled him from his childish outlook, and from which childhood for a time but only for a time protected him.

Perhaps he feels the need to fight the world, still for some reason secret even from himself. Nora, who spoke at the A. A. meeting I have described, must have been a combative person. She came out of childhood with fists clenched, a scrapper, as a boxer comes out of his corner in the ring. She was aflame with anger which she thought then was righteous indignation but which now she thinks was not rational at all.

Or perhaps he demands more than this artificial world and its specialized tasks can supply to him as a person. Perhaps he has unrealized capacities that reach out and seek without finding—and employ alcohol to still their restlessness.

More often than not, the alcoholic is an individual of pronounced energy and intelligence, imaginative, and of quick perceptions. Like many other neurotics, the alcoholic neurotic is apt to be a creative person. But in some sense he is always a misfit. There is no convenient groove or mould for him to slip into. He suffers, he struggles, he fights, he is a prey to many anxieties—but he can never see his own difficulty any more than a man lost in the deep woods at night can see the stars. He is caught in a snare that can only be removed from the outside.

The meaning of all this is that the arresting of alcoholism does not involve the patching up of personal defects like holes in some old tire, but the reaching for a living adjustment, the fulfillment of

starved and distorted capabilities. The process is one of building, not of covering a retreat.

And reliance upon a higher power, in the sphere of religion or psychiatry or of common humanity itself, is wholly practical and necessary. Since the alcoholic cannot, unaided, understand his own personal plight; since he is so prejudiced and ill-trained a witness on matters relating to himself, there is no help whatever unless greater wisdom and faith than his own can provide it. As I say, this is a matter of practical common sense, but there is something here also of mysticism or of the spirit, by whatever one chooses to call it, and the more progress alcoholics make, the less they fear to acknowledge the spiritual resources of human kind.

Group Therapy

Marty Tobin says that the initiation fee for A. A. is so dreadfully steep that no rational human being in the whole world would voluntarily pay it—but the A. A.'s have paid it already.

On the other hand, their membership enables them to draw upon something just as much beyond ordinary standards of price and value—the strength of the group. Perhaps it is paradoxical here, as so much about alcoholism is paradoxical, that whereas a chain is no stronger than its weakest link, the individual A. A. need be no weaker than the strength of his group. He is not alone.

The operation of this principle is probably readily explicable in psychiatric terms, and one may find many religious connotations in it also; but there is no necessity to go beyond observed and recognizable experience.

The other night I went to an A. A. meeting at which, for no special reason, the talk ran on attendance at these weekly gatherings. There isn't any plan or guide to discussion, and usually the range is pretty wide, but sometimes a topic gets started and a number of A. A.'s have something to say about it. In this case a remark at the beginning gave direction to the whole meeting.

"If what you're after is sobriety, and you achieve it through A. A.," someone reasoned, "then why should you bother to keep on coming to meetings?"

Warren Fulbright accepted the challenge. "A man gets where he

can leave liquor alone. 'All right,' he says, 'I can take care of myself now, and I won't bother about showing up on Thursday nights any more. Why should I?' Well, he goes along for a few years, and then what do you find? Very likely you see that man hitting the bottle again. He's been too long out of touch. He's been trying to go it alone."

Others went beyond this. Herb Mason said that, in his case, he was aware of a sense of obligation. He had been away from liquor for years but he still attended meetings regularly because he felt he had contracted a debt he could pay only by doing for others what had been done for him.

"It helps the new members," he concluded. "If you'd been through the early period of this group with only two showing up week after week, you'd know what I mean."

Miss Helen, a white-haired woman of gentle breeding who, although the matter is strictly unimportant in A. A., may be found listed in the Social Register, said she was glad to realize that attendance at meetings did help other alcoholics—that it was one kind of Twelfth Step work.

"I don't manage to do much Twelfth Step work," she went on. "I'd like to, but not much comes my way. It is pleasant to think that at these meetings, which mean so much to me, I may be helping someone else."

Nora said succinctly, "A. A. isn't given to you to keep—you've got to pass it on."

"You get it, you grow in it, and you give it," said someone else.

Nobody put it in just these words, but the unanimous feeling seemed to be that the meetings were a reservoir of strength—the more the strong and the safe could contribute, the more the unsteady and the unsafe would be able to draw. And, of course, the alcoholic long away from meetings would be outside the group and its strength, and thus more likely to yield to the malady that may be arrested but that wise alcoholics insist is never cured.

Let's say I'm here at an A. A. meeting tonight. I re-live some crucial part of my own experience with alcohol, I re-live the experiences of some of these others with them. We share our observa-

tions in the effort we are making, a joint effort in which all individual efforts are pooled. A week from tonight we shall be here again, and it will be natural and helpful to account for any significant things that may have happened involving alcoholism or the common interest of us all.

Under these circumstances, can anyone say that the awareness or force of decision or strength I take from the meeting is my own alone? I do not think it possible. I have recruited my resources from the joint stock, and I am making myself one of the links between this meeting and the next. I am part of an enterprise that, I hope, will be more certain, better rounded, better supplied with wisdom and sinew because of me. I have been entrusted with some part of the larger strategy, vision, responsibility. Next week I shall be glad to make a good accounting.

"I'm happy to be here—and I'm happy to be sober." These words spoken by an alcoholic in a company of his fellows are never casual.

Is this the way *group therapy* operates? No doubt it is only part of the story but it is a part obvious to us all, carrying such conviction of experience that the rest can hardly outweigh or even match its importance.

Never speak of the weak link. Always speak of the joint strength. Individuals who are faltering will reinforce their capabilities out of the surplus of the group. We have never planned to succeed alone. From the beginning we have planned to succeed together.

Wider Horizons

It would not do to stop just here in recounting the values of this fellowship. One thing more is the fact of a continually lengthening view, a sense week in and week out of an ever-freshening wind; for, since human experience is endlessly varied and supplied with marvelous range and capacity to feel, to understand, to share, to know, to be immediately aware, the joint experience of such an undertaking is never closed or finished. It goes on. It grows.

The last word is never spoken.

The other night when we had gathered, a stranger came in, a

man of good appearance named Everett Henry. We learned of him that he had had a long alcoholic history, the sort of history we well knew, and that he had won sobriety and had lived in his later years a happy married life. Suddenly it was discovered that his wife had cancer, and after an agonizing few months she died. Mr. Henry had left the pain of home for fresh scenes and had come among us for understanding and a little of our strength, if we had strength to give.

As an alcoholic, this man knew how to attain oblivion—so easily, so surely—and oblivion was what he most wanted on earth. A thousand times in minor climaxes of his life he had turned to alcohol, and now in the greatest ordeal of all he was walking soberly and silently, facing out all that was beyond any human power to have avoided.

The remarkable thing, perhaps, was that so little was said. Nothing but plain words on either side. Everett Henry wanted understanding. He had it quickly, we all knew that. He wanted strength, and we hoped he had that too, but we knew this wasn't a problem for words.

Often most of us had cried into our whisky glasses out of sadness for nothing that mattered much; we had known the excesses of sentimentality to which our illness made us prone. But now and in this situation we were adults and gave what we had to give in a silent understanding. The horizon seemed wider when the evening was over.

In another sense the feeling of growth arises when we ourselves are away from home and realize that the fellowship of alcoholics like ourselves is approaching a practical universality. It reaches into far places, great and small, with a common experience which likewise marches on.

Again Myself

These are the reasons, the methods, the principles which, so far as I am able to explain them, enabled me to stop drinking and to arrest my alcoholism through A. A. But with me it didn't happen at once.

Warren Fulbright was a man for whom the program succeeded immediately. So was Herb Mason. Herb had consulted doctors and psychiatrists. He had read books. From all sides he sought to learn what was the matter with him—surely there must be some complex and hidden explanation of the fact that he, educated, intelligent, so successful that he was overworked and under pressure all the time, should become an uncontrolled drinker.

Herb's drinking became serious when he began to try to do too much. He took on some government work, he had his own business, and he was the head of a cooperative association. He couldn't get through the load of a day without alcohol.

"I just needed a shot," he said later. "I was licked unless I could have a drink. I found that alcohol enabled me to go on as long as I had to."

When his drinking became alarmingly advanced, he took sedatives in order to sober up, or as a substitute or accompaniment for drinking. Looking back now, he thinks the sedatives meant the same thing to him as liquor. He thinks the real reason he drank was to make himself unconscious. "I'm convinced of it," he says. Anyway, he was in a pretty desperate situation and the quest for the mysterious cause—as it seemed then—was getting nowhere.

He started going to A. A. meetings and immediately he said to himself, "This is for me." Almost at the same time it struck him that what was the matter with him was not a deeply secret trouble but something quite obvious. "The difficulty with me was alcohol," he observes. "I was an alcoholic and I needed to stop drinking."

But this recognition was only the start of a struggle he had to make. The next six months were particularly rugged.

Larry Shannon stuck with A. A. but it didn't work for him for quite a while. For three years he was off and on, trying and failing, forsaking alcohol and going back to it in a big way. If A. A. had been an outfit interested in making a good record, Larry would have been thrown out; but A. A. simply went on its appointed course, and in due time Larry would show up at another meeting.

"I was trying to observe the Twelve Steps without giving up alcohol," Larry says now. "It didn't work."

He could see what had to be done, but the bottle was ready at hand and when he wanted a drink badly enough, he took it. The first drink, of course, was never the last; as always with an alcoholic, one drink meant a lot of drinks to come.

But how badly did he need or want a drink? As it happened, he lived in a dry town and had to drive three miles to the nearest package goods store. He would get up some mornings, his nerves all a-jangle, quivering for a drink. Only with desperate efforts at controlling himself could he wait until the time when the liquor store would be open; then he drove the three miles, more of a menace on the road than a drunken driver, as he says now, not a rational human being, completely absorbed in the one quaking and shrilling desire.

Stumbling into the liquor store, he could not control his hands. Unable to count his money, he spilled a wad of bills on the counter and let the clerk take out the price of a quart or a pint.

"And then," says Larry, "with that bottle in my possession, I was all right. I didn't have to stop and take a shot before I started home. I knew I had my liquor and I could drive home like a normal human being."

This experience, often repeated, ironically suggests to Larry the power of faith, and also raises the question whether he needed a drink as badly as he thought at the time.

At all events, long trial and error proved to him that an alcoholic couldn't win through A. A. except on A. A.'s own terms, and he abandoned his reservations and his attempts to manage some drinking on the side. He has now been without alcohol for more than three years. He and Herb Mason and Warren Fulbright are A. A. wheelhorses.

My own experience was not so simple as any of these, though I thought it was going to be. My life had become unmanageable. I could see that, in fact it had been unmanageable for a long time. I was heartily sick of moral and physical misery and of a sense of failure and defeat. I realized that I did not enjoy drinking and had not enjoyed it in any real sense for years. The idea of enjoyment

was certainly in my head—I wanted a fierce and exulting pleasure from alcohol—but it was never fulfilled. I was bitterly unhappy a good deal of the time, though in my preoccupation with myself I kept adopting new pretenses, trying to fix things up with new colors and glistening decorations.

All this was true, yet my first attitude toward A. A. was somewhat sardonic. I suppose I felt more or less as a drunkard used to feel when he was inveigled into a prayer meeting. But of course I did not hear any prayers for my redemption. What I heard was realistic talk, and after a while I could see that A. A. was working for these others, though I did not think it would work for me.

I was still different, you see. Oneself is always different. It took a while for me to learn that the exchanges of the A. A.'s did not merely happen to open up experiences identical with mine—that there was not an occasional strange coincidence—but that they illumined an exactly similar life history. I saw myself not in one instance but in a dozen, a hundred.

Before I really knew it, I was an A. A. member, because I didn't have to sign up. No one does. If you have trouble with alcohol, and if you say you're a member, you are. You're the judge. So I realized I should be getting something out of this group, and actually in the moment of that realization I was a member.

Sobriety came easily at first, just as in my periods of penitence and good resolutions, but something inside me wondered how long it would last. I tried to prepare myself by the A. A. method so that I could resist temptation. Would I, like some habitual drinkers, miss the good times with the boys? That was a laugh. I hadn't deliberately been out with any "boys" for years, though I sometimes wound up in their company. I hadn't had any good times with liquor. It was even hard for me to imagine just how temptation would present itself, for I had always contrived to let temptation take me by surprise.

And I asked myself, "Is it, after all, going to get back to the old business of willpower?"

Maybe it was, since there was no medicine to be administered to

me to correct my bodily need for alcohol. Pep talks and willpower—that wouldn't be a formidable help for an alcoholic. By this time I admitted that I was an alcoholic. But there really were not any pep talks in A. A., and I began to realize that the person bearing my name, if asked to exert a measure of willpower, would be facing a new and different situation—because, if he accepted the opportunities opened to him, he would not be the same person.

A changed point of view, a wholly new orientation, and, as I later heard Marty Tobin say a good many times, a program of action—a program in which I was to make myself active day in and day out—would have a great deal more to do with my success or failure than willpower. But, at last, I was to be in a position to use willpower to accomplish something I wholeheartedly wished to accomplish, not something I shrank from and sought to evade.

For a long time I couldn't be sure how much of an A. A. I had become. My introduction to the group had been casual. After Warren Fulbright's unsuccessful visit, no one had really come for me. One or two friends had suggested I drop in at a meeting. Some A. A.'s had talked to Alice—I think she had approached them first—and she urged me to investigate. So I had just started attending, and it wasn't like a vaccination, with a few days to prove whether the operation has taken.

It was an indefinite arrangement in which you knew you were going to get some medicine but you didn't know when or how. By this, of course, I don't mean medicine in a literal sense but the sort of thing that counts in the mind, the morale, the spirit. Perhaps the explanation is necessary, because some doubters have tried to put A. A. on a literal, physical basis.

"You mean they just talk?" a woman asked Nellie Winer, who is a member of another A. A. group who occasionally visits ours.

"Yes," said Nellie.

The woman registered doubt. She had Nellie take her through the routine of a typical meeting.

"Of course we have coffee afterwards," Nellie concluded.

"That's it!" exclaimed the woman. "That's it! They put it in your coffee."

Slip

I had been going along for a while and my affairs had been going along. The farming, or market-gardening as it came more and more to be, wasn't too productive and, like all others in the business, I had trouble with labor. Vegetables went to waste because in the summer season there was no one to pick them. But the guest house-country life idea worked well. Alice and I had a big stone carriage shed fitted with a new roof and turned into small apartments; later we had new sections added at either end.

The transformation was accomplished without any change in the character of the farm. As it happened, the terrain was interesting, and occupants of the lodges in the old shed could look out over a sort of valley where the cultivated fields ended and boulder-strewn hills began—hills on which red cedars grew like pillars and domes, and huckleberry thickets turned bright red in fall.

I did some landscaping around the stone shed, took away the old wheels and rims that had been rusting for decades, and planted grass between the shed and the road. I arranged a row of fairly large rocks to mark off the roadway and keep the customers from running their cars over the new lawn. Everything was shipshape and attractive.

Some of the customers were comfortable to have around and some were not. It was a nuisance to answer a lot of silly questions on a busy morning, and it was worse than a nuisance to hear complaints about mosquitoes or snoring in the next apartment or the lack of fish ready to bite promptly during the first ten minutes some man's hook was dropped into the water. I nursed several grudges the first summer season we operated full scale, but there was one occurrence that called for more than a suppressed rumble of anger.

One August afternoon of a day that had begun with sunshine and innocence, the wind shifted into the east, clouds scudded over, and by the time darkness had fallen torrents of rain were soaking down out of the sky. A big, solid man named Greer, one of the self-willed, dominating type with plenty of money, drove back to

the farm during the downpour and managed to run his car over my line of rocks, across the new lawn, and right up to the door of his apartment. He didn't want to get wet, you see. In the morning the ruts in that lawn looked to me like trenches. Greer had not even limited himself to a single pair of ruts. He had backed and messed around.

He had paid Alice and cleared out right after breakfast, so I couldn't tell him what I thought of him and his night's work. I couldn't get to work repairing the damage either, because there was too much else to do and you can't fix such things well in August. At the moment I had business in town and I took my anger with me. Just about the first thing I did after I hit Main Street was to buy a bottle of Bourbon. I don't remember any premeditation. It was just something I was set to do, as an alarm clock is set to go off. I don't remember too much after I started drinking the Bourbon, either. I put myself in a state of complete drunkenness with the greatest celerity.

So it wasn't temptation that made me break training. It wasn't a gnawing desire for alcohol. It was rage pure and simple. I was full of blind anger and I got drunk grimly, joylessly, and in such businesslike fashion anyone might have thought I was doing it on contract. Eventually Herb Mason overtook me, made me go to his house, and there I was sobered up, completely against my will. I wasn't ready to sober up. Now I did crave liquor but all Herb would let me have was coffee. I had gone without breakfast and lunch, yet I refused to eat anything.

Herb had telephoned to Alice and at the proper time he drove me home. He took a look at the ruined lawn in front of the stone apartments and didn't grin too much. He understood. Alice understood too. She did not utter a word of reproach. I felt awful physically and I was mixed up mentally. Far from being filled with penitence and revulsion, I really wanted to get some whisky and complete my cycle of drunkenness. I craved alcohol and I hated the mere thought of willpower.

But I did have the sense to say, "Not now. I won't take a drink now." I had my eye on tomorrow around the corner, and knew

that if I needed a drink worse then, I could and would get it no matter who tried to prevent.

I got through a couple of days by deciding the same thing—"Not now. I won't take a drink now. But tomorrow!"

I did not feel like going to the A. A. meeting, but Alice got ready as usual and in the end I went with her. Our friends, or some of them, were standing around when we arrived. I didn't know what to expect. The last thing I wanted was sympathy or a moral attitude. I didn't want to be treated as an erring brother.

Jim MacIntyre turned, saw me, and conveyed just the gleam of a smile with his eyes. Otherwise he was deadpan. "You want a good boy to take care of your lawn?" he inquired.

Those who heard him laughed. I laughed. Except that my lawn had acquired a good deal of fame, I wasn't treated any differently in A. A. than before.

Six months or so later I slipped again. I don't know whether temptation was to blame then, or what I rather prefer to call experimentation. I had grown confident—of course this was no new experience in my alcoholic history, but the quality of confidence was a lot different. It seemed to me I had changed my outlook enough and had gained the necessary depth of understanding to drink normally. An occasional drink would not do any harm.

One aspect of my confidence was the fact that I knew I did not have to have liquor. I could leave it alone if I liked. Therefore I was free, out of bondage. This drink would be an intellectual affair, in a sense, a new departure for me and one that I thought would succeed.

I bought the liquor in town and conducted my experiment after supper when Alice left for a hospital auxiliary meeting. Before I took the first drink, I was—or so it seemed—a complete man; after the first drink I was incomplete. I couldn't do without a second, and I assured myself a second wouldn't hurt. But at this stage the experiment had gone by the board. Already I was back in the old pattern of alcoholism and alcoholic thinking.

I finished the bottle, started for town, and had a whole night before me. I made the most of the night but that wasn't enough, and

in the morning I tried to borrow money of the ticket agent to buy a ticket to New York. He wouldn't lend me a nickel, naturally, in my condition and after a while I was picked up by a couple of the A. A.'s who did what was necessary and eventually delivered me back at the farm in fair shape and this time in the most abject state of contriteness.

That was my last slip. My years of sobriety are now accumulating, though there must be a long cycle before twenty-five years of alcoholism are matched or exceeded. In my two regressions I had made two discoveries for myself, confirming the experience of others and bearing out what I had been told. I had learned that I must adjust realistically to circumstances pleasant or unpleasant, and that adjustment involves self-understanding and rational behavior. As part of this lesson I had gained a fresh respect for the serenity prayer:

God grant us the serenity to accept things we cannot change,
courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference.

I had learned also that what alcoholics say is true: they can never take the first drink. They can never drink at all. This is their limitation but it is also their emancipation. They can never drink even a little, but they are altogether free.

Slips à la Mode

My slips, I think, may be taken as typical, for here as always the working of alcoholism runs true to type. But it may be helpful to recount one or two experiences of others.

Ralph Carlson, for instance, had sobered up through A. A. and was accumulating a pretty good history. One night he was out with a man who had been sent to him by an old friend, with an urgent request that he entertain this visitor and show him something of the town. "The town," of course, was New York. The stranger, naturally, had to have something to drink.

"I did what I had been told to do," said Ralph long afterward.

"I explained that I was an alcoholic and that I couldn't drink. I ordered one of the popular soft drinks that comes in bottles. This fellow I was with had a Manhattan. Pretty soon he had another. I ordered another of my brand, but it tasted more sweetish than the first. When my friend had a third drink, I had a third too, but there I was stopped. No living human being could take more than three of those cloying portions—it would be as easy to drink three glasses of maple syrup.

"My new friend said, helpfully, 'Well, do you suppose just one Manhattan would hurt you?' I guessed it wouldn't.

"It didn't seem to. I drank it and then looked in the mirror. I hadn't turned red or swelled up or anything. I looked normal. So I had one more Manhattan.

"And one more. I don't remember too much after that—except that pretty soon I was back sleeping in doorways."

Fred Boyle was one of those who worked on systems. He knew what the score was, but he kept deciding to beat alcohol with reason. One of his methods was to accompany drinking with enough physical exercise to keep the liquor beaten down. He would use up the alcoholic energy through exertion. Another was to wait until five o'clock in the afternoon before taking a drink, and then to absorb his liquor slowly and moderately. He would make a good start on systems more or less like these, but the better they worked—for a while—the more certain it was that he would go completely overboard. He simply built up his alcoholic intake until it carried him with it like the tide. Where was reason then?

John Gerson was a man I knew only slightly, but I do know why and how he slipped. He wasn't ready to give up alcohol. He hadn't taken enough of a beating to be convinced that there was only one way out of the rat race.

John kept a dry goods and notions store for a while, but only for a while. He kept quarreling with his wife, he was behind with his bills and his credit was an uneasy thing, he went on binges about once a month, and the mark of the alcoholic was on him. He came to a few A. A. meetings and said he would be around again,

but he didn't appear. I saw him one night, presentable, courteous, reasonable in everything he said, and a night or two later I saw him hauled into jail, his clothes torn, offensively profane and abusive, fighting drunk. It would be reasonable to say that he had touched bottom but in his own personality somewhere was still the last reservation. He wasn't ready to quit. Not permanently, not honestly and irrevocably.

He had admitted that his life was unmanageable, and in any sober moment I am sure he would stand by the admission—but he wasn't really coming to the showdown in the inner shadows of himself. He was still sticking it out. His shop was closed up some months ago and he has left town, but I have no doubt he is still sticking it out and may do so quite a while longer.

His case is different from that of Bill Reck. Bill goes pretty far in acknowledging the unmanageability of his life, but he is a sceptic. He's not satisfied that alcoholism is really a disease, he's doubtful about any spiritual solution for what seems to him a physical matter, and he doesn't get much out of group therapy. John Gerson, in short, long ago came to an outward acceptance of the fact that he is an alcoholic and can't—or shouldn't—drink. Bill Reck is stopped at the outset; he's arguing about and against basic principles.

It would be interesting to know whether the resistance in these two men, both of whom had said that they wanted desperately to give up drinking for good and all, may not in the last analysis be exactly the same thing. One remains surreptitious and secret in spite of avowed conviction, the other offers professed grounds of logic and reason. It seems to me likely that the same force of alcoholic persistence is here acting in two different ways, adopting two different methods or disguises to protect the individual from losing the support and refuge of alcohol.

This is only another way of saying that in both cases the individual is sicker than he thinks.

I have one more specific example to cite, that of Johnny Corson, who slipped simply from habit. He had quit drinking but not long enough to have acquired much experience of sobriety. Due to circumstance, he found himself alone in a small town with hours on

his hands. He couldn't just hang around the streets, naturally. He had to do something.

Always before in such a situation as this, he had drifted into a saloon, ordered a beer, and proceeded to make a sociable acquaintance with someone. So far as deliberate purpose went, he did not want to begin drinking again—but going into a saloon was so much more natural than anything else that he followed the familiar procedure. There he was, standing at the bar, ordering one beer, and then another. He was off. Beer wasn't enough and he changed to hard liquor. For the next few days he was drunk.

Experienced A. A. members have their own formula for meeting such an emergency. They are aware that lonesomeness won't do, especially lonesomeness in a strange place, and usually they look in the telephone book to see if there is a local group listed under "A. A."; usually there is. Otherwise, the nearest policeman often knows about a local group or someone who belongs to A. A. The rest is easy. Not infrequently, a telephone conversation is enough to tide things over; the mere presence of A. A. companions, the feeling of support in case of need, fills the void of the empty time in the strange place.

Sometimes an emotional state precedes an alcoholic's slip or return to alcohol. Herb Mason told me that when he saw Bill Hosford at the scene of a forest fire, he knew Bill was due for a fall. The excitement, the separation from normal routine, the build-up of energy and emotion were bound to be followed by a drop, probably a sudden drop, and unless Bill had special resources—and at that time he didn't have—he would go back to the bottle. He did.

At periods of stress, fatigue, excitement, of any unusual ordeal or emotion, alcoholics need help; if they are in A. A., they can draw together, put out double anchors, make all precautions sound and true, and know that they will weather the test. Otherwise their families and friends must understand and help. The alcoholic's behavior under such circumstances is not due to wilfulness or lack of intelligence or willpower—it is due to his underlying illness and the sudden weakening of his resistance at a time of turbulence when he needs to have outside aid.

A. A. Traditions

To know about A. A., one must know of the traditions that embody much of the spirit and approach of that fellowship and its program. There are twelve of them:

Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A. A. unity.

For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

The only requirement for A. A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A. A. as a whole.

Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

An A. A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A. A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

Every A. A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

A. A. as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A. A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.

Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

B. All the Lost Companions

I WRITE not only of those who have succeeded in arresting alcoholism in one particular way, nor only of those who have succeeded, but also of some who have faltered, who seem to have failed, or who have just begun to try. The failures are illuminating too.

My sons have learned in school of the poet who wrote, "The proper study of mankind is man." I will, perhaps, consult them later about the modern college view of this suggestion; meantime I will submit to them my own. All depends, I think, upon what is meant by man; it is his humanity which is the proper and necessary study, not his introspection or his dreams of conquest or his bare bones or his image as he would like to see it. Such is the point of view I urge here: let us think understandingly of humanity.

About a dozen of us alcoholics were gathered in the parish house the other night to talk things over once again. I suppose we were an odd selection out of the general pilgrimage of mankind; but for alcohol, most of us would never have met and few of us would have become friends. I looked about at the familiar faces. Warren Fulbright was there for his last meeting of the season before he started back to the city; the light shone on his gray hair and his head was bent forward a little in a thoughtful attitude. He looked like an old warrior.

At the end of the row, Herb Mason, also gray-haired, sat back, pipe in hand, an amused smile on his face, as so often. He always seemed to be sizing us up pleasantly, aware of the collective harvest

we represented. And Marty Tobin, lean, alert, blue-eyed, articulate in a vein everyone liked and counted upon. Next to Herb Mason sat Steve Charles, smaller of stature, well-built, his face weathered like that of a sailor. A little while ago he had said, "I never took a drink in my life without getting drunk." There was a good deal behind that statement.

The Case of Stephen R. Charles

His home had been near Boston; he was a kid in the days before World War I. At fourteen he got a job as an errand boy in a paint shop. He could look out for himself, he was a likable sort, and he had the run of the premises. In the main office there was always a large bottle of grain alcohol which had its uses in the business of the paint company. Other employees got Steve to take out some of the alcohol from time to time, refilling the bottle with water, and handing over the abstracted spirits to them for beverage purposes. This went along for a while until Steve decided to try a nip of grain alcohol himself.

"Like a fool, like a kid, I drank it straight," he recalls now. The strong stuff almost strangled him. He got drunk and had to be sent home at two in the afternoon. He remembers how he fell down in the factory field on his way from the shop.

That was his first time.

"I had learned you've got to put water with the stuff," he says. By the time he was eighteen, he was hanging out with the big guys on Saturday nights. "I always got drunk. I liked it. I never got sick. I drank with the crowd every time there was a chance. I am sure now that most of that gang were alcoholics but they didn't know it."

When the war broke, Steve got over to France in the Army and learned first hand about champagne and other French wines, fine and cheap. He drank everything that was going. His outfit was in the provinces being made ready for action, and at last the orders came to move out. The boys celebrated, and when Steve again became aware of the responsible world, he was alone; he had blacked out for two days at the age of twenty, but he still didn't know what

it was to be sick. He'd just shake it off. He had to bum his way across half of France to get back with his outfit.

He didn't drink every day but on all good occasions. "If I met someone who had a jug, I would be right there on deck, and I'd usually get in some kind of jam."

The war over, Steve signed for a hitch in the Navy. The way it was then, he says, so long as you could get over that gangway and to your bunk without bothering anyone, no one would bother you. He finished his Navy hitch as a first class petty officer.

Already he was by way of being a painter, a first class craftsman, and he went to work around Boston. On Saturday night he went to dances and got drunk. Getting drunk didn't make him popular in all circles. "I lost all my girl friends," he says.

Along about 1923, though, he got married. He decided then that he would have to change his method of living. He wouldn't get drunk any more. For a year of married life he lived up to this decision. He stayed sober and his first child was born.

"Then I decided to drink beer or ale. I drank it every weekend and there I was, started all over again—drunk on Saturday nights and no dinner Sunday. By that time I had started getting sick from it. In the town where we lived there were joints that opened at six A.M. Anyway, you could get in at the back door, and I would have to have that drink before going to work. But I still controlled it so that I didn't get stiff on the job.

"When the noon whistle blew, I didn't eat any dinner. I went across the street and had two boiler-makers."

A boiler-maker calls for two ounces of whisky and eight ounces of a strong ale that is known around Boston, or was in those days, as the poor man's whisky.

Steve's wife hated his drinking, and they began to have fights. After the day's work he would rush in and get a couple of drinks and hurry home, because his wife watched the clock and was suspicious of any delay. But she wasn't fooled about those after-work drinks and when she and Steve fought in earnest, he would go out and get good and drunk.

Still he kept pretty straight on the job and in time was made

foreman with fifty painters working under him. For eight years he held the foreman's job and then trouble began to pile up. He began to "carry a jug" into the shop where he kept it in his desk. It was known, of course, that he was drinking but he handled his job all right—until the time he came in drunk and the boss had to call a cab and send him home. This wasn't the end, however. Things went on as before until the next year.

"My wife had threatened to leave as soon as the kids got out of high school, but I didn't believe her. One night I went home and it really wasn't home; there was just one bedspring, one bed, a table, and one cracker on the table. I was broken-hearted and I tried to kill it with booze. I was up all night and I stopped in a joint just before going to work—that was the killer for me."

The superintendent called him in and said, "This is the end, Steve. Will you give me your resignation?"

"Nope, I won't resign," Steve said.

He was fired, and he said to himself, "To hell with them," and got good and drunk for three weeks. He had plenty of friends and they kept him going. He wound up in the Chelsea veterans' hospital where he went through a sobering up process and came out to face a new beginning.

He decided to join the Navy and, a little to his surprise, he passed the physical examination without difficulty. This was July, 1941, and in ten days he was at sea, bound for Murmansk. He was soon made a chief petty officer and had charge of the central damage control locker on a big ship; this gave him access to all the alcohol he wanted.

"I never would get in trouble on the ship," Steve says. "It was wartime and I was responsible. I wouldn't allow myself to go out of the picture—I was just coasting along."

He gave alcohol to a big moving picture star who was on the ship as a coxswain, and he became friendly with a big league baseball pitcher who wouldn't drink anything harder than beer. Although he kept himself out of trouble, he was sick many a time. When the war ended he was at Okinawa, and after the cruise home he was paid off in New York—and, being homeless, he was a free lance.

Steve had saved a good bit of money out of his pay and had made a lot more playing poker. He had played poker all his life and as an old timer he almost always won from the greener players who thought they could take him. All in all, he had \$3,000 in the Navy bank.

"Now," he said to himself, "I've got to be smart. I don't want to get drunk and go through this dough."

He registered at a midtown hotel in New York, had his money put in the vault, and drove the girls in the office crazy by asking every now and then to get the roll so that he could take out a hundred dollars at a time. Finally he relieved them of future annoyance by keeping the roll.

With something more than \$2,500 in his pockets, he proceeded to make the rounds. He woke up cleaned out, but he still had his good clothes, his bags, and so on. He began peddling these and when the money was gone he wound up in the Bowery.

"Then the trouble really started," he says. "I knew nothing about the Bowery but I soon learned."

Drinking was the routine, drinking all the time. "No eating, just drinking. Once in a while you'd spend thirty-five cents for a bed in some flophouse, but usually you'd sleep in somebody's doorway where you happened to be."

Once in a while Steve would run into some guy who had been working on the railroad or washing dishes, or some guy would sell a pint of blood. That would mean money for drinks for Steve and others too. About three or four in the morning the joints on the Bowery closed, and the bums would go across to Hoboken where the joints stayed open until four and opened again at five—the one-hour closing being required by law so that the places might be cleaned up.

Finally at eight there would be migration back across the Hudson on the ferry and to the Bowery again. Or, if they hadn't been to Hoboken, the boys would begin dropping out of their holes a little before eight.

"You didn't want to eat," Steve says. "You'd rather be drinking."

One form of potable alcohol—potable at least by Bowery stand-

ards—was known as smoke; this was denatured alcohol which, when mixed with water, smoked up the jug. If the jug didn't turn white and smoky, it was a sign the stuff was poison; it still had the oils in it.

Sometimes you'd get cleaned up and go to a mission, get up in front, and take a nose-dive. In other words, you'd kneel and make a show of accepting God and seeing the light. All the bums did that, Steve says. Then the mission would supply them with clean underwear and dungarees and send them on some kind of job.

He "came off" the Bowery on one expedition and started up-state as far as White Plains where a pint of blood would bring \$25 but you had to have a two-day layover. You were typed on Tuesday and the blood was taken on Thursday. During the layover the Salvation Army advanced the price of a bed at a flophouse and some sixty cents a day for meals, the advance being deducted from the payment for the blood.

When Thursday came, Steve found himself with about \$22. He met a man who told him about a job in the maintenance department of a school. Steve bought some clothes and applied for the job.

"I can use you," said the maintenance man at the school, and added something about sending for Steve's bags.

"I haven't any bags and I haven't any clothes except these," Steve said. He told exactly what the situation was.

"I used to drink myself," said the plant man. "I'll see you get some money."

School started, and after his working hours Steve liked to fool around the gym. He had played football and baseball, and he showed the boys what he could. They liked him. The dean, a young man in his middle-twenties, was impressed with what he saw, and asked Steve how he would like to be assistant coach.

"I've always believed in being honest," Steve says. "I said to myself, 'I've got to tell this guy the truth.'" He did.

"Look, you can stop drinking," said the dean. "You look good now."

Well, sure, Steve said, he guessed he could stop—maybe for a year, maybe for two years, maybe forever.

"I don't want to get you into this and have you get drunk," said the dean.

The coaching job was a good one and it meant eating with the staff. "Came the golden opportunity," Steve says—a white collar job, good living, fine prospects. His pay had been \$250 a month; now it was \$400. "The dean took me to see the head guy and he said I would have to supply references. That was all right. I always had good references."

So Steve started in with the kids. The football season was on and he worked with them and rubbed them down after practice and after games. He was going swell.

"But we beat Peekskill, and that was the team to beat."

Steve couldn't miss the celebration. He took his first drink but he didn't get drunk right away. He did, however, spend the night out and at daylight rode back to the school in a cab. "My mistake was that I had a jug."

The boys lined up for morning exercises and the dean looked Steve over and missed nothing. "You've had a drink," he said. As it happened, Steve's schedule did not call for any instruction from him until ten o'clock when he was to have charge of a manual training class. "You can't be with the boys when you're like this," the dean went on, "but you go back to your room and throw some water on your face and lie down. I think that by ten o'clock you'll be all right."

Steve went to his room, and of course the jug was there. "Right away I felt as guilty as hell. I'd let these people down." He still planned to make his ten o'clock class, but he kept hitting the jug and instead of getting better, he got worse. Without volition on his part, he passed the line of no return. After a while he simply walked out, made a short cut through the woods, and hailed a cab. He left all his things in the room just as they were. His school experience had ended; all its opportunity had gone in a night.

He had saved some money and he checked in at his favorite mid-town hotel in New York. A night there and he hit the Bowery with \$500—one drink, and it all went.

"I was back to the old skidway again. But you finally reach a point where you can't drink any more. You say, 'The hell with it.' "

When this time came, Steve went to a Soldiers' Home; there are thirteen scattered over the country and he says he has been in them all. "They give you clothes and feed you up—you eat the best—and you don't do anything. A lot of guys go for that."

After a period of knocking around, Steve went to an employment agency on Fourth Street and was shipped out to a hotel a short distance from Liberty, N. Y., where he was taken on as a painter.

"I didn't have anything," he observes. "I was only a body."

The hotel was patronized by important people—sportsmen, actors, pretty models, men and women with money. Two westerners operated a riding concession and when one of them went off on a drunk—he couldn't get along with his partner—this gave Steve another chance. He had been spending his spare time around the corral for he liked horses and had become an expert rider during World War I.

"Can you teach people to ride?" asked the remaining owner of the concession. Steve said he could, but the hotel told him to stick to his painting. The westerner threatened to take the horses away, which settled the matter in Steve's favor, though he had to move off the hotel premises and find himself a room. He would take people out over the trails and soon became popular as an instructor. The westerner collected five dollars for each party, and of this Steve got one, plus his tips.

Customers waited for him because they preferred him to the owner. He taught John Garfield, the movie actor, to ride western style after he hadn't been able to get it from other instructors; this meant a \$25 tip, but what Steve liked best was Garfield's satisfaction.

"I stayed sober until the end of the season," Steve says, "and then I crashed and it was back to the Bowery. I know just about every doorway from Cooper Square to Chatham Square. Sometimes you get so sick of yourself you feel hungry. You haul off and say to yourself, 'Start eating.'"

At such times there was a place on Mott Street where there might be three or four hundred in line for coffee and bread. Steve would wait his turn and then walk up to Thirty-Third Street—quite a walk

when you're barefoot—for two bologna sandwiches, courtesy of the Church of St. Francis of Assisi, at nine. "So you grab this, and at noon there's a place on Ninth Avenue and Fifty-Eighth where you can get a bowl of soup. At three o'clock you're down near Fourth again at a spot where you can get a pretty good little feed."

Free lunch of a sort was available at bars, and there were the "Horse Markets," bare, cheap restaurants. On a hot day in the summer of 1947 Steve dropped into one of these across from Hester Street with eight cents he intended to spend for a cup of coffee, two stale rolls, and a bowl of bean soup. He noticed a young man he describes as an eccentric, probably not older than thirty-five, who was wearing an overcoat in spite of the heat.

"He had a jug in his pocket, and I said to myself, 'I'm going to have that jug.'"

The stranger was so drunk that he lay over on the table, and finally the owner of the restaurant came along and helped him to the desk where he was to pay. Steve made ready to be close on the fellow's heels outside—but just beyond the door he "did a spinner." The owner of the place had gone in, but came out again.

"This guy looked awful," Steve says. "His eyes were closed and I opened them. I put my hand inside his coat. I said, 'He's dead.'"

A policeman came from across the street and told Steve and the restaurant man to drag the overcoated stranger to the nearest police call box. "The cop didn't want to touch him, he was so crumby," Steve says. But when the wagon came, the policeman had a bawling out for his pains; the stranger was dead, just as Steve had known. So then an ambulance was called, and that was wrong too; the coroner was the only one who had authority now.

Steve had missed his best chances to grab the stranger's bottle and when he looked now, it was gone. Another bum had grabbed it. "But I did get a drink out of it. I followed this guy around the corner. It was smoke in the bottle."

"And here this young guy was dead. It was terrible when you thought of it. Probably booze killed him." Steve was used to seeing booze kill men on the Bowery. There were some twenty-five flophouses accommodating from one thousand to two thousand men

and "all day long you would see bums being carried out dead."

Steve was always an avid reader of newspapers, and he liked to go into libraries when he could. He had read about A. A. but his first encounter with A. A. in the life was in Washington where he had hit a skidway on G Street. He began talking to a guy who said, "I know where you can get a drink if you play it smart." He told Steve about an old mansion A. A. had taken over as a club, and Steve was soon on his way there.

"I had a jug of sherry wine with me, and I had taken a drink out of it. The first thing I did was ask for the men's room and I stashed the bottle there. Then I walked over and sat down. I'll never forget the lady who spoke to me—she was really beautiful. She said, 'You have a problem?' I said yes, I was sick and needed a drink. I would appreciate a drink very much.

"She said, 'How about something to eat?'"

"I said that would be fine. She said, 'Are you ready to go?'"

"I said I wasn't in shape to go anywhere with her, and she said she would be the judge of that. She said, 'Are you ready to go?' I told her I had to go to the gentlemen's room first, and I went back down there and killed the jug in two gulps. I said to myself that this didn't look like a drink so I'd be nice and have something to eat anyway. She took me to a high class place and asked for a secluded table—that was all right with me.

"I said to myself that I'd be honest with her, and I told her about the jug. She said that was all right, she had done worse than that herself. She asked where I was sleeping and I told her in somebody's doorway.

"'How about a drink?' I asked her. 'No,' she said, 'you've got to make a start.' She said I should go to a nice hotel. I said, 'I don't want to go to a nice hotel. I don't even look good.' But she took me to a place down on the avenue and so, anyway, I had a flop for the night.

"She said, 'Will you come back tomorrow and have a talk with me?' I said, 'Sure. I'll be back.' Steve did go back, but he had revisited the skidway first. She said, 'You've been drinking.' 'Yes.' She said, 'I can't do anything for you while you are drinking. Did

you eat?" No, I hadn't eaten. We went back to that restaurant and I did push some food into me. I kept that up for three days.

"I was feeling guilty as hell. I wasn't treating this woman right. It was my first contact with A. A.—she was doing Twelfth Step work but at the time I didn't know it, but I did know she was sincere. I did like her talk. She was trying to get me sober. Well, I wasn't ready, anyway."

It was back to New York for Steve then, and to the Dog House on South Street—the Seaman's Church Institute—so-called because everyone there was in the dog house. He went to one A. A. meeting but he was stiff at the time and it didn't mean anything.

Steve's life went on this way for a while longer. People liked him. He was able, intelligent. He could get on. But after a few months he would get drunk and head back to the skidway in New York. The beginning of the turn came when he married again, a sweet, attractive young woman who was good for him. If his alcoholism had been a bad habit, he would have thrown it off then; but he was still sick. He stayed sober for a while, then he slipped; the old rule was true, he never took one drink without getting drunk.

He and his wife went to an A. A. meeting in New Jersey and he promised to go to meetings at home—the place that had now become home to him after years on the loose. He tried Antabuse, about which I will speak later. His wife worked to help him, for she knew the score. She realized perfectly well that he was ill.

One time Herb Mason called him up and invited him to the traditional A. A. New Year's party—New Year's Eve and no liquor.

"Gee," says Steve, "I looked at those guys, everybody sober, and I said, 'What the hell, these guys look all right to me.' I liked it. I like it when anybody talks sense. I don't like anything that's phony—I'm old enough to see through it."

He began going to meetings regularly and at first he would be jumpy—it took six or eight months before he could settle down—and he didn't have anything to say at a meeting for a long time. He just listened. He told himself, "These guys have got something that's different." The conviction took hold.

Steve Charles has now been sober for four years and he says he

doesn't even want a drink any more. He lives an unrestricted life and travels around a good deal with his wife in the course of a year. They go to A. A. meetings all along the line, and he'll plan a great circle route to Florida in order to get in new places and meet new people. He says he knows he is just one drink away from the old life—one drink, not two or three or a dozen, but one.

"There are times," he says, "when I get jumpy and snap back at my wife. I expect that. I know I've got to go through it, and she understands. It's part of the whole thing." But he's happy. He lives an outdoor life, he's liked, he has a fine marriage, he makes lasting friendships.

I have told the story of Steve Charles in detail because it is one of the remarkable ones. An old idea was that alcoholism resulted partly from weak or bad character. Steve had a strong character all the years he was a drunk; his behavior was bad or unfortunate, but he was never anything but rigidly honest. Oh, he'd steal a drink, but that was expected—it was a case of dog eat dog—and all the time the limits of principle were pretty sharp and clear.

I spoke about this to Steve and he said succinctly: "Your character is what you are with a drink in you." He thinks he had two strikes on him as an alcoholic when he was born. Incidentally, he wants sometime to stop off in Washington and look up the woman who tried to help him at the A. A. clubhouse there. She didn't miss by as much as she may have thought.

The Case of Andrew Banks

Andy Banks usually sits beside the big table, often resting his elbow on the surface and looking intently from under dark eyebrows at whoever is speaking. Andy must be in his forties but he has a youthful look; he is attractive, cheerful, and always earnest. He says, "It took me fifteen years to dig this hole, and I can't fill it up overnight."

It isn't necessary to go into the details of his early life. He came of a good family in moderate circumstances and profited by a public school education; the only exceptional thing about him—and not so very exceptional—was that he became an alcoholic. But even

while he was drinking, he got along well. He learned the trade of sheet metal worker and plumber, and held a good job in a fair-sized city.

Eventually he was taken into the firm and his prospects should have been excellent. He met people, drew plans, estimated jobs, and supervised some difficult work. But, to put it plainly, he was a drunk. At home he reached the point of neglecting his wife and children long before he let drinking interfere with his work too much. Unexpectedly, the head of the firm died and that left Andy with the entire business in his hands, responsible only to the dead man's wife.

How soaked he was in liquor now becomes apparent. He walked into the glass-enclosed office one morning, apparently as usual. Suddenly he said to his old boss' widow, "I guess you and I had better call this whole thing off."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I'm through," he told her. He picked up a few things and walked out.

All this had happened without the slightest premeditation. He had not given a thought to quitting. There was no earthly reason why he should be willing to throw up any job, for he had no money saved, his wife and children were neglected, and he had even let Christmas go by without doing anything for them. He knew of no prospects. The next day, almost the next moment, he might be in the gutter. But to throw up this particular job with its special opportunities and promise for the future was sheer alcoholic madness.

There he was, jobless, drunk, fiercely alone in the solitude of his disease. He kept himself drunk. Finally his wife persuaded him to take a trip to our town where there were some friends of the family; in the simpler life of a country community he might be able to straighten out. Somebody told her about Herb Mason, and she called him up.

A little later she was driving Andy toward Herb's house—but it was later than either of them thought. Andy couldn't talk straight, and he kept trying to pick things out of his tongue, the things that impeded his speech. He worked hard at that. And then there were

gremlins—as he calls them now—running alongside the car. Little black-robed figures ran along, some of them jumped on the running board, one or two got into the back seat.

Andy remembers Herb talking to him. He remembers how Herb said that he had touched bottom now and there was only one direction to go. They took him to the hospital and he was able to sign in, but soon after that he was unconscious and violent. A straitjacket was the only thing, and there he lay, restrained in his raging, while Herb Mason, Jim MacIntyre and others did orderly duty, watch on watch, through the long hours of night and early morning. All in all, Andrew Banks had seven days of delirium tremens and this straitjacketed climax.

The A. A.'s who had stood by him were all strangers, but now they were strangers no longer. Andy began going to meetings and, as the saying is, he "got" the program. He has not gone back to his trade but he has had a couple of good jobs and is on the way up.

"I'm happy to be here," he says. "I'm happy to be sober."

His wife is here too, a pretty, light-haired girl who listens closely as the meetings go on.

The Case of Pierce Rowe

Pierce Rowe has been absent for some time. If he were present, he would be lounging with his long legs stretched out in front of him, his hands in the pockets of his slacks, tweed coat carelessly closed with only one button around his somewhat gaunt torso. Now and then he would withdraw one hand to run the fingers through his light sandy hair, and his gray eyes would stare oddly at anyone else in the room. Pierce is about fifty but he has delicate pink cheeks and a boyish cowlick. He waxes his small mustache. He seems to keep young.

He has never admitted that he is an alcoholic but at more or less regular intervals he gets raging drunk and chases the woman who comes in to take care of his house for him. He lives alone except when his sister visits him. Usually he tries to keep sober for as long as she is in town, but a year ago she stayed so long that he didn't make it. He pulled the bedclothes from her bed, dragged the mat-

tress into a corner, and began throwing chairs around, and when she tried to telephone the police he yanked the telephone wire out. She took refuge with a neighbor.

After that, Amy Rowe—this was the sister's name—found out more about Pierce than she had ever suspected, though she had not been wholly unaware of his orgies. At her urging, he began attending A. A. meetings. But we knew he did not stop drinking. He tipped and soaked all the time, even if he had no violent outbreaks.

He appeared perfectly docile and reasonable. He seemed to make it a point to scorn nothing, openly at least, but he plainly knew that A. A. was not for him. He had convictions about man, the world, civilization, and so on. He couldn't accept any religious or spiritual idea; he had long ago concluded that the concept of a higher power was wishful thinking or superstition. Also, as some of us knew, he had his inclination set toward a married woman and that attachment, though it had come to nothing so far, was continually in his mind.

Pierce does not need to work for a living; his family sends him regular remittances. His chief interest is to write a play, but there can be no hurry about this, since it has gone on for years. He is much seen at the public library asking for the works of Racine and Molière, and regretting that he cannot get them in the original French. At his house he has a great accumulation of books.

It is no secret that so far he has written nothing. Friends visiting him have seen the waste of scribbled sheets lying in the corner. His housekeeper says he is still collecting notes and references for his masterpiece. The truth is that he lives in alcoholic unreality, successfully avoiding the present day. He thinks of himself as a creative type, but his life is utterly sterile.

His neighbors can tick off the progress of his existence by the growing pile of empty bottles under his shed. He thinks they are out of sight. Sometimes he has long talks with Herb Mason. He is so utterly reasonable that it is difficult to quarrel with him. He offers no resistance to be beaten down; the resistance is all inside, tough, arrogant, hard; and his outward posture prevents anyone from so much as reaching his main line of defense.

When he attended A. A. meetings, there were times when he would go out for a minute or two and then come back with an exaggerated glow in his eyes. Nobody said anything, but did he think he fooled anyone? Did he think Steve Charles, for instance, was so gullible as not to know he had taken a quick drink? It was only himself he was fooling.

He hasn't been to a meeting for a long time. He tells Herb Mason he would like to control his drinking, but there the matter rests. He wants everything to come all right without any effort or inconvenience on his part. No doubt he tells his cronies that A. A. has nothing to offer a man of his intellect and sensitivity. Nobody minds that, for we know that Pierce Rowe is a deeply sick man. He's sick, and he has a boy's emotions and impulses in a man's body. His sister would have him see a psychiatrist, but he won't do that either; he has as much contempt and ridicule for psychiatry as for A. A. It's a case of Pierce Rowe against the world—and all the time there are more empty bottles under his shed, and time itself is running out.

An Incident Concerning Florence Wragg

Florence Wragg is to be thought of as a large woman, now approaching sixty, still strong, softened somewhat after years of hardness. You can see that she has worked hard. She never had much; she hasn't much now.

Her early life was about what anyone would imagine it—a child brought up in poverty without advantages. When at last she married, it was perhaps less from love—no matter what she told herself—than because this was the thing to do. Anything would be better than nothing. You wanted to move on, not to stay the way you were. Later she said, "My husband wasn't much good but I wasn't much good either." She had two children when he finally left her.

She tried one thing, then another, and finally found a house outside of town, almost surrounded by woods, a cheap, rather bare place, though it would serve. She had been drinking steadily for a long time. She couldn't do without alcohol.

One night she wanted to go out on the town, but there was no one to stay with the children. A person in her state can't send for a baby sitter. She looked at the children, a boy and a girl, asleep in their room. Taking two candles, she placed them on the window sills of the living room and lighted them. There, she thought, if the children wake up, they will see the light and won't be afraid. Of course she had been drinking. With that done, she went out and was gone until morning.

When she got back to the house, the candles had burned completely down, and hot flames had run up along the wood of the window frame, blistering the old paint and eating into the wood itself, turning the surface to charcoal. She will never know whether some stranger happened along and extinguished the flame, or whether by some chance the wood itself resisted. She wakes in terror and remembers that night, and she thinks perhaps it was God who kept the house from burning down with the children inside.

What twist of alcoholic thinking, she wonders now, made her think it was a good idea to light the candles and leave the house alone? How could she have believed that the flickering candle-light would keep the children from being afraid in the night? For her, as for others, alcohol was a strange mesmerist.

She learned of A. A. later, after more drinking and more disgust with herself, and she had no trouble with the First Step; her life had long been unmanageable. She was like a person who has been on a long, stormy journey, and at last comes to solid ground.

One Who Passes By

Sadie Ellis Sloan is of uncertain age; probably she looks more oldish than she really should. Her hair is gray, dry, and wispy, her face unnaturally white and pinched. She drinks much and eats little. She and alcohol have had their conspiracy against the town, the world, and all else for so many years that they are almost beyond counting.

She came to A. A. meetings for a while, looking on with a kind

of surprised incomprehension. She was a person beyond reach, separated by wide, secret spaces of the inner fairyland she had built for herself with long, solitary drinking.

One night she came to the parish house at the wrong time. A choir rehearsal was in progress and she mistook it for an A. A. meeting. She sat for a while, weaving back and forth a little, peering with her puzzled, anxious eyes. She praised the hymns in a few scattered sentences, called for some more worldly music, and after a while went out again into the night air.

Sadie Ellis Sloan is a living chapter in the story of alcoholism. Anyone with a feeling for the value of the human spirit cannot avoid a time of sober reflection when Sadie passes by.

Jerry Freeman's System

Herb Mason says, "I was talking with a fellow the other day and he told me he doesn't need A. A. He has a system all worked out. He's going to drink just four ounces of whisky a day—not a drop more. If he finds himself drinking five ounces, he'll quit."

Bill Thornton is first to laugh; he was putting away a pint a day, or something like sixteen ounces, and that wasn't enough, when he finally came to the stopping point. Steve Charles just smiles tolerantly. The rest of us have a good deal of reminiscence in our amusement.

"Think of that—four ounces a day," Herb Mason continues. "Of all the teases!"

He mentions no names, but it is plainly Jerry Freeman he is talking about. Like Bill Reck, to whom I referred earlier, Jerry can't see alcoholism as a disease. He's different from Bill, though—what he misses is the *cause*. He has to know what gives alcohol its special importance in his life. For years he has been looking around for this cause as another man might search for a lost gold coin. It does not occur to him that he, of all human beings alive on the globe, is the least likely to come upon the secret springs of his own alcoholism. The discovery, if it is ever made, will have to be made by another—and then Jerry won't believe.

And now he has a system, not his first. He's had others that haven't worked, but of course this is different; just four ounces of whisky a day—clear-cut, perfectly plain, a recipe for a contented future. There is, however, another clear-cut, plain meaning that is completely different; this system of Jerry's is sheer rationalization, one more device for justifying the first drink, for disguising the unpleasant fact that the first drink by any other name or surrounded by any sort of pretended logic is still just that—the first drink. Not the only one—the first.

"He'll be drunk within a month," says Herb Mason, no longer smiling.

An alcoholic, who craves far more than four ounces of whisky, whose past has been a succession of binges and reforms and unfulfilled promises of control, sets up this plan as one of *satisfaction* whereas it can only be one of continued *temptation* and *provocation*. By Jerry's reasoning, a man walking across a broad pond on the narrowest and unsteadiest of planks is more likely to keep his feet dry than one who shuns the water.

The experience of alcoholism is never finished; it continues day by day. There are always men and women like Jerry engaged in this or that project dear to their imaginations. It is for this reason, to express something of the dynamic quality of the collective human problem, that I report Jerry Freeman's system and provide no ending. Come afternoon, there will be Jerry measuring out his four ounces, golden seductive drops . . .

Thuel Hardy in Egypt

Anyone who knew Thuel Hardy a few years ago would hardly recognize him today. Then he was a drunk, bitter, rejected, reduced to the lowest straits. Today he is a business man of evident success, well-dressed, showing much more poise than most of our contemporaries, and extremely clear-eyed. He founded and developed his own manufacturing concern after he had become a member of A. A., turning his back upon the most fantastic of alcoholic careers.

But for liquor, so far as anyone can see from the outside, Thuel

would have had no real difficulties. His family had at least a comfortable amount of money, his associations were all of the best, he was educated in good schools, and finally he was embarked successfully as a sales engineer for an important corporation. Long after he began drinking, he thought the corporation would never dare to fire him, for in a few years he had produced something like \$300,000 in new business.

But his drinking became worse and worse. He was warned time and again; finally he was told to go. As he understood later, he had been kept on as long as this only because his boss had been a heavy drinker and was interested in the problems of alcoholics.

So there Thuel was, wrapped up in himself—bitter, rejected, hot with a sense of injustice that he, who had done so much for the company, had been fired. He was resentful against his family too, especially against his brothers.

He tried to get into the Army—World War II was beginning—but his alcoholism betrayed him. The Army wouldn't have him. Still smarting, still resentful, he joined a volunteer ambulance group and, still drinking, was shipped out to the Middle East. He was on a binge at Capetown and was thus responsible for a delay in the sailing of the ship which had important military supplies on board and was following an exact sailing schedule for security against submarines.

But the incident that most vividly characterizes Thuel's alcoholism occurred in the desert under the scorching sun of Egypt. He was serving with an allied force which issued a small liquor ration—not enough to supply the compelling demand of his nerve and body cells. So little, he knew, would set him afire with craving. With one drink and no more he would undergo nameless tortures; he must save up his ration until he had enough on hand to take care of his whole compulsion. Ingeniously, he found a way to do this.

He emptied a gallon jug of water, the most precious stuff in the desert, and accumulated in the jug, little by little, enough liquor to provide him with a binge in the grand style. As he said later, it wouldn't have mattered if he had thrown out a gallon of gasoline

—there was plenty of that. But water was another matter; there was too little, the supply was uncertain, the need was great. Water meant life. Thuel knew this, but he had to have his full need of alcohol, the means to meet the indescribable craving a first drink would touch off.

Thuel was to travel great distances and to know gutters and doorways and escapades without number before he came at last to the admission of the First Step and the outside help that could re-establish him as a useful human being and, still later, the head of a prosperous business. His story is true, yet it seems past belief as one sees him standing across the room, thoughtful, considerate, responsible. He moves over toward Warren Fulbright; the two men talk in grave tones.

Between what they were a few years ago and what they are now lies an impressive measure of the disease of alcoholism.

The Leisure of Fred Skiles

Fred Skiles is a young-old man, a veteran of World War II, who has never yet been one of the number in this room. We wonder if he will make it, and how soon. He left college to go into the Air Force. Once he parachuted to safety from a burning plane, and once he emerged with slight injuries from a crash landing. After the war he went to work as secretary for the head of an investment concern.

One thing led to another until, within a year or two, the head of the firm died and left Fred a controlling interest in a chain of cut-rate stores with which he had been having something to do. There was no reason for Fred to interfere with the management of the stores and he settled down to lead a cultivated life.

If his is the cultivated life, the essence is alcohol; but Fred does not see this—yet. He has never married. He likes to take trips, but he always comes back home within a few weeks, and at home he sleeps until almost noon and stays up until almost midnight. He doesn't get drunk, but he has slowly given up the custom of regular meals. He drinks instead.

Is he an alcoholic—yet? Who knows? The least one may say is

that the signs are up. His drinks mark off the cycle of his day as buoys mark a channel. The reason I mention Fred here is because alcoholism is not always a disease of orgies and conspicuous extremes. It can happen quietly too.

A New Man Speaks

Our stories have so much in common that it would be sheer repetition to tell them all. Anyone who reads these words must have begun to know us well. But there is a new man sitting at Herb Mason's left; he's been to two or three meetings, listening in silence, and hasn't had a word to say yet.

Now Walter Burdick glances at him, giving him a chance but not crowding him too much. "How about it?"

Cliff Warner, as it turns out, isn't backward. He's been thinking both at the meetings and between meetings. He works as an electrician and has the reputation of being a skilled man. He is, perhaps, a bit past forty.

"What I want to know," he begins, "is why other men can drink and I can't." The question is a rhetorical one; he soon shows he does not expect it to be answered. "Only this afternoon," he continues, "a man called me into the next room from where I was working at his house. He was mixing a drink and he offered me one. He could take a drink, but if I took one I would have to have another. And another. And another.

"Then on my way back to the shop I would have to buy a bottle and put it in my desk and pull at it all the rest of the afternoon. Then I would go home and I wouldn't want any dinner, but I would have to hide a bottle in my wife's car so that I could go out later in the evening and have another. And another. And another. In the morning I would need a drink before I could go to work.

"But that man could drink and it didn't mean anything to him. I saw him later on this afternoon and he had forgotten all about it.

"Other men can drink but I can't."

Cliff has finished speaking, and for a moment there is silence. Then Walter Burdick expresses what most of us have in mind. "Brother," he says, "you've said it all."

9. *What to Do About It*

I SHOULD like to imagine myself now talking to my sons on the top of some high hill, with the sky bright and the wind stirring all around. We have come up through the trees and the brush, walking at times a narrow path, not sure of what might lie around the next turn. Now we have been waiting a few minutes in silence, looking out at the landscape that stretches clearly to the horizon.

I resume speaking to these two young men, but deliberately I choose general terms. We are not to think of special cases now, but of the broadest truth and experience that includes all special cases. We are to be impersonal, objective. I am aware of my sons and I want them to be aware of me, but we are sitting almost shoulder to shoulder, looking out together.

What can be done about alcoholism?

Well, there is no one thing to do. What should be done depends upon the individual, his background—in the colloquial phrase, where he has been and where he is going.

Some psychiatrists and medical men, specialists in the subject of alcoholism, believe that the alcoholic is primarily a product of his ancestry, of the way his parents and grandparents lived, how much they drank, and what their racial backgrounds were. All this, of course, is fixed and immutable, a chapter that cannot be revised or corrected; but perhaps, to a large extent, it can be recognized. Knowledge of the past can be used to shape the future to better ends.

But there are no specialists who believe in the matter of ancestry and background exclusively. All take into consideration the development of the individual—"the heartaches and disciplines of childhood, the challenges of adult life such as job changes, marriage and love affairs, religion or the lack of it, and the habits of one's friends and the social pressure to drink with them."

Here is the wholeness of the outlook. We are invited to look upon a world of individuals, all different, all trying to make their way in the maze that civilization has somehow provided, all subject to incalculable influences, small and great, temporary and persistent. The prospect is bewildering and frightening, but even here there is order and reason if one seeks it patiently.

To begin with, all of us can at least know about alcohol, what it is and how it acts.

The Fact of Alcohol

The most important thing to know is that alcohol is an anaesthetic or narcotic, not a stimulant. And it is important to look behind these words. The definition is not intended to make alcohol any better or any worse or any different. Alcohol will always be the same, but a reasonable person's point of view toward it may be changed or adjusted, just as attitudes toward many things of daily life change when we know their nature.

To say that alcohol is an anaesthetic does not mean that when you take a drink you begin to put yourself to sleep—everyone knows that is not so. The first drink may have no effect that you or anyone else can observe, especially if it is a mild one. But as alcohol does begin to affect you, and as you laugh and talk more easily, and feel better, and stop being concerned about things that are ordinarily a worry, what has happened is that the higher control centers of your brain have been somewhat relieved of their authority. Nothing has been added—except for the intake of alcohol—but something has been taken away.

This isn't bad. It may be extremely good. Alcohol is described as the safest of the sedatives and is valuable for relieving anxiety and pain. It puts the brooding, sharp-edged, self-punishing com-

manding officer in you a little out of business. You are freed from this high brass annoyance. You can give up the strict stuff and be yourself.

If you keep on drinking, still more of your brain function is relieved of duty for the time being. You don't talk straight, maybe you stagger, you can't keep your mind on any one subject or, perhaps, you can't get it off some one subject. You aren't rational. You feel important, you feel that you can do about anything you choose, but you wind up falling down or fanning the air. Nothing whatever comes of your overblown self-confidence.

If you continue drinking still, you will finally enter into a state of complete anaesthesia. You'll be dead drunk.

This description is a little over-simplified, because the stages of intoxication are different in different persons. Some may laugh more, some may cry more, some may want to fight. Some are interesting and appealing as they drink themselves out of immediate reality, and some are objectionable. But all wind up in the same state, for complete drunkenness or anaesthesia is always the one thing.

Of course it is possible to have the release of alcohol without going on through any of the stages of real intoxication.

The promptness with which alcohol takes effect depends upon the time required for it to be absorbed into the system. If you drink on an empty stomach, you are sure of an immediate kick; if you drink on a full stomach, the reaction will be slower and you will be able to drink more without serious effect. Gin is absorbed more quickly than whisky, and whisky more quickly than beer. Mixing drinks makes no difference, despite the long tradition to the contrary, though there may be a psychological quickening—for if you expect to get drunk more quickly when you follow gin with whisky or the other way round, your expectation will hasten the effect. Actually, what counts is the total amount of alcohol you absorb, not the particular vehicles or mixtures from which you absorb it.

Doctors know that your psychological state has a considerable influence on your reaction to liquor. If you are keyed up, excited, buoyant, you are likely to experience the first effects of alcohol

more readily. Your mood and the set of your behavior lead right into them.

One of the most important things to know about alcohol is that it requires no digestion. It passes directly into the blood stream of the body. Just a few minutes after you toss off a quick one, alcohol appears in your blood. From then on, the amount of alcohol in your blood keeps on increasing as you drink, though the rate of absorption is somewhat less rapid than at first. If you accumulate alcohol more rapidly than your body can get rid of it, you are heading for intoxication. The body has only three ways of eliminating alcohol—burning it just as other food is burned in the process of supplying energy, excreting it in urine, and evaporating it through the breath.

The old time prohibitionists denied valiantly that alcohol could be a food. Of course they were wrong. Haggard and Jellinek in *Alcohol Explored*, previously quoted, say: "The fact that it is a food carries no implication of its merits as a food. That alcohol in sufficient amounts may cause intoxication and may be an expensive source of calories does not alter the fact that the body derives energy from it."

A great disadvantage is that the individual who consumes a great deal of alcohol is led to cut down on other foods that have vitamins, minerals, and proteins essential to health. Alcohol, though it produces energy, does not have these.

Concentration of alcohol in the blood is slower for a person of large body weight than for a person of lesser weight. This is because of the relatively greater dilution in the larger body.

Most people, Haggard and Jellinek say, show some intoxication at concentrations of 0.15 in the blood. Few show symptoms when the concentration is below 0.10 per cent, and virtually none when it is below 0.05 per cent. The figure of 0.05 is therefore taken as a measure of alcoholic moderation, and they say that for a man of average size this concentration is rarely exceeded if he drinks two moderate highballs, two cocktails, or a quart or more of beer on an empty stomach, or double these quantities after a meal.

If a man drinks four ounces of whisky on an empty stomach, the

concentration of alcohol in his blood rises above and remains above 0.05 per cent for two or three hours.

Many drinkers think that a little alcohol adds to their acuteness and even to their mental powers, and this may be completely true. One of the effects of moderate drinking is to sharpen some of the senses a bit, though psychologists say that the ability to make use of this increased sensitivity is impaired. The senses gain, but discrimination or judgment can't be quite as effective. As to mental powers, when alcohol releases a general frustration, or breaks down a blocking of impulses, the intelligence does seem to go to work again along a cleared path. All that has taken place is a deadening of inhibitions, an overcoming of a conflict or deadlock; of course there has been no heightening of mental ability as such.

As drinking continues beyond the phase of moderation and over a period of time—the years of experience known to the alcoholic—the drinker's physique acquires an increased tolerance. This means not only that he can drink more, but often that he must drink more in order to satisfy the receptivity or the craving his habitual resort to alcohol has set up in his body. He becomes dependent upon alcohol, and his dependence insists upon the consumption of alcohol at an increased rate. Physical changes take place; his metabolism is altered. Some of the changes, if drinking continues, become irreversible.

Some Conclusions

All this has dealt with the *fact* of alcohol—what alcohol is and what it does to any human being. Another step forward is to put some of this *fact* into a form in which it will mean most to the person likely to be threatened with alcoholism.

It isn't how much you drink, but what it does to you.

This is something to be aware of and not to forget. No matter what the general principles are, and the rules of the game for humanity at large, the real test comes with the effect of drinking on the individual. Let's repeat the same words with a special emphasis:

It isn't how much you drink, but what it does to you.

Drinking is special, personal, an experience of a particular person, apart from all others. If you drink, the role of alcohol in your life is not going to be exactly the same as that in the life of the man next door, across the street, or standing this minute at the same bar. If you become completely drunk, you will be in the same state as any other complete drunkard, but you will have reached the state by a somewhat different series of mental and physical episodes and processes. If you become an alcoholic, you will share that disease with all other alcoholics, but you will have had different motives, sensations, hopes and fears along the way. Even the common experiences, and there will be so many of them, will seem different because they are *yours* and happening to *you*.

Therefore consider closely, not so much what you read or what you notice in the other fellow, but what is happening to you in your own life.

Alcohol, no matter what it may mean to you, is still a narcotic. When the effect wears off, a normal person is willing to revert to his usual state—to recover from whatever adventure it has provided for him. But the alcoholic is unwilling to revert to his usual state, to lose the sense of relief or escape, the immunities, the sense of peace or power, the personal enlargement, he has found in liquor. He seeks to perpetuate them, perhaps to intensify them, through more drinking. He has discovered through alcohol a healing of the pain of life, not real of course, but for any given moment real enough to him so that his deep hunger is aroused.

Now there is no doubt that a normal person also turns to alcohol occasionally for just such reasons. In our driven world, it seems, a human being can take only so much punishment and then he feels he must do something about it. One of the easiest things is to drink.

If drinking is established as a social practice, it is this much easier as a refuge. No one can fairly say that occasional resort to alcohol for purposes of escape or protection will mark a man for the fate of alcoholism. *But here is a danger sign.*

The danger is the greater because the drinker will probably not know whether he is drinking merely to lessen nervous tensions or really to get away from the world.

Business of Being an Adult

The surest protection against this sort of progressive misuse of alcohol is to be mature in one's relationship with other people, the job, the exactions of society, the handling of personal affairs. Maturity here must mean a taking of things at somewhere near their real value—not suffering inordinately at a slight to the feelings, not dropping into emotional disappointment at a reverse in business, not holding too much aloof from associations that are necessary, just because they cause an initial feeling of inadequacy.

Unfortunately, being a complete adult, even being essentially mature in emotional attitude and balance, is not a matter of choice. The individual cannot help what he is. Into his development has gone all the background of his parents and no doubt much background before that, his experiences of childhood and youth, his physical endowment, countless accidents of association. But to a certain extent he can and should rationalize his life in terms of adult importance. His teachers, family, friends may be of help; but family and friends will not help if they set themselves up as instructors or authorities.

If a person is psychically unfitted for the life ahead of him in the modern world, it is far better for him to consult a psychiatrist at once—when his unfitness becomes apparent—than to resort to alcohol with the prospect of progressive alcoholism before him.

The business of being an adult in relation to alcohol has some rules that can be put down simply as a matter of common sense:

Don't rely on alcohol as a solution of your problems.

If there is any doubt about it, try to make up your mind as to why you are drinking. Since you're grown up, you should know about your actions. To be sure, you act on instinct and impulse many times, but drinking is an institution, a continuing activity. What does it mean to you? Do you like the taste of Scotch? Fine! Do you get rid of fatigue and jangled nerves sometimes? Well enough. Do you find that alcohol helps you enjoy the society of friends? Good—but in this case you won't be drinking alone or

with people you don't like. The social element will be the important thing, not the drinking itself.

Don't lose sight of consequences. A first principle of adult behavior is a proper, alert sense of relationship between cause and effect, beginning and end. Unless an individual has this, he cannot be realistically and responsibly oriented in the life of mankind at large. He will have to be looked after by others to a greater or lesser degree. If drinking is more important to you than the consequences that flow from it, you're going wrong.

Remember that there are hard drinkers, and everyone knows a few of them, who nevertheless meet their obligations. They are not alcoholics, and their example has no significance whatever for alcoholics. To them, no matter what appearances may be at any given moment, drinking is subordinate to other things. There is no guarantee that they will not become alcoholics, but the chances are that a good many of them—their personalities and habits being what they are—will go on as they are indefinitely.

Don't let social pressures be more important than your own judgment. Almost anyone can sometimes be persuaded to take one more drink after he has said he wouldn't—this is normal behavior, at least it can be most of the time. But the man who lets others decide when and how much he will drink, or who drinks for the sake of appearances, is not an adult drinker. This yielding of control is very likely a step toward alcoholism.

Candidates for Alcoholism

Everything that can be said about danger signals of alcoholism applies more closely to some individuals than to others. Why? Is it because some are born with a tendency to alcoholism? Perhaps it comes to that. Remember the view of some doctors that family history, custom, and so on, are vital factors.

It's also because some do not mature emotionally and are insecure in modern competitive life. If you are not mature emotionally, you won't admit it. You won't realize that in your case anything of the sort can be true. Please reflect that sophistication is not the

same thing as maturity; most of us are over-sophisticated these days, and sometimes it's a bad sign. We think we have the inside track, the savvy, the know-how of the times, but we may well lack the seasoning and ripening necessary for a certain emotional tone and fiber. We aren't sure of ourselves, after all. We react in odd and unreliable ways. We run to extremes. We look for an out where there really isn't any—as in alcohol.

And intelligence or education aren't the same as maturity. We may be over-cultivated and overbred, too much trained in the things of the mind. This training may in fact operate as a screen between us and the tests of practical behavior we should have learned how to meet. We're insecure without knowing it.

Warren Fulbright has asked many groups of alcoholics whether, in the light of after-knowledge, they believe they were cut out from the start to be uncontrolled drinkers. About a fourth reply that they are pretty sure they never did or could drink normally. This is impressive, because the alcoholics responding to the question are men and women who have acquired a good deal of knowledge about themselves.

Bill Dillon, a contractor and builder, who was born and brought up in Ohio and traveled to many places, working at many things, before he wound up in the East, says: "I'd say I was an alcoholic from the start. I began drinking as a kid. A bunch of us would pile into an old jalopy and run over to a neighboring town where we could get liquor. We all drank, but I was the one who always wound up in the bottom of the car with the feet of the other fellows on me."

Steve Charles, another man who has worked with his hands and knocked about in many places, says: "I never took a drink in my life without getting drunk." It was as simple as that.

Marty Tobin says: "I've no doubt that I was slated to be an alcoholic. I began drinking when I was fourteen and I never wanted to stop. The thing crept up on me without my knowing it, just as a man becomes a diabetic. It's gradual—he isn't aware of what's happening."

"I'm convinced that I had an allergy for alcohol," says Herb Mason. "I didn't become an alcoholic at once, but looking back on it, I don't think I ever did drink normally."

Certainly Joe Thacker, the boy I knew at school who drank hair tonic to win admission into a wonderful artificial world, was an alcoholic at the outset of his life.

What is the lesson of all this? It seems to me it's just this: if you have trouble with alcohol, you should stop and consider how many strikes you have on you already—it's quite possible you've started with as many as two. Don't brush off the question. Get somebody who knows about alcoholism to help you answer it.

On the other hand, there's the interesting case of Warren Fulbright himself, a man who did not become an uncontrolled drinker until after the age of fifty. Obviously, there's no statute of limitations on this thing. There's no fixed time to look for alcoholism, no hour set for a rendezvous. You must expect the stranger for an appointment of his choosing, not of yours, nor at any time set down in the books.

Danger Signals

How will you know the stranger when he comes? It's difficult. Marty Tobin, remember, says that the development of his alcoholism was as gradual as the onset of diabetes. I've said the same thing myself. Even when you've got it, sometimes you don't know—and you don't believe others when they suggest that you're in trouble with alcohol.

Nevertheless there are danger signals along the way.

When you don't enjoy drinking, and crave liquor not less but more, that's a blunt warning. That's a characteristic alcoholic principle.

When you drink in the morning, you're entering upon one of the most familiar and characteristic steps of alcoholism.

When you are willing to drink with people you don't like, it's a bad sign. The importance of alcohol to you is going up, and other values are going down.

When you look forward all day to a drink at night, alcohol is

becoming disproportionately significant. This can happen to almost anyone under special circumstances, but beware if it happens regularly to you.

When you get drunk without meaning to, or against your express determination to stay sober, you're doing what alcoholics do. This also can happen occasionally to almost anyone, but normal drinkers usually don't let it happen twice—at least not in the period of a year or two years. It's not a practice of men and women with a sense of consequences and control over their own conduct.

Such danger signals as these you can observe for yourself, for they are instances of conduct that have an outward form, apart from all rationalizing and from all mental states. Even the fact that you don't enjoy drinking, though it may not be apparent to anyone else, is for you a recognizable milestone. You can't miss it.

Other omens of developing danger are more subtle: changes in your own point of view, an increasing importance of drinking in your life, reliance upon liquor for values that liquor should not supply even if it could, the progressive phases of alcoholic thinking and alcoholic behavior. Most of these come later.

If you reach the point at which you are *blacking out* or *losing consciousness* for greater or lesser periods of time, or at which you are *substituting alcohol for food*, you have passed the line of danger. You are in serious trouble.

Should a Man Get Drunk?

"Say a young fellow tastes liquor and likes it, and goes on drinking until, without meaning to get that way, he's drunk," suggested Warren Fulbright. "If he's going to be a normal drinker, that's the end of his drunkenness. It's an unhappy experience and he doesn't let it happen again. Now take another young fellow. He gets drunk but the first time isn't the last time. Within a year he'll be drunk several times more. He's likely to turn out to be an alcoholic."

"No," said somebody else in the group. "Lots of men get drunk who aren't alcoholics and never become alcoholics."

There was pretty general agreement with this, but Warren Ful-

bright wasn't satisfied. He wanted to equate drunkenness, and the frequency of drunkenness, with the development of alcoholism.

"There you're getting back to the old temperance arguments," observed Marty Tobin. Nobody wanted that, for everyone here was a hard-minded realist.

The group never did agree. Most of the alcoholics present thought that occasional drunkenness was not inconsistent or at least not irreconcilable with normal living and with generally controlled drinking.

"Some get drunk and feel all right the next morning," someone suggested.

Warren Fulbright accepted all this, and yet in the end he established what he was after. At least, I believe he did. In the first place, drunkenness must be considered in relation to many circumstances. Getting drunk at a college reunion or on election night or at a birthday celebration is surely different from just getting drunk. This must be recognized; but when all is said and done, getting drunk is not normal.

"If the length of time between the occasions on which a man gets drunk shows a tendency to diminish—that is, if he gets drunk oftener at shorter intervals, he's heading for trouble," Warren concluded.

"If he needs more liquor in this twelve months than he needed in the last twelve months, that's a sign of danger.

"Put it differently. If a man can't get along this year with the amount of liquor he had two years ago or five years ago, he's probably becoming an alcoholic. Bear in mind that when he was younger he could get away with liquor with less difficulty. His drinking, naturally, wouldn't have shown up so much. But as he gets older and is more vulnerable, he needs still more alcohol. He probably has a higher tolerance and more capacity for liquor, but his hangovers are worse. He begins to show signs that he's using himself up.

"It's the progressive feature that is so important. You don't hold your own. You become steadily worse. You need more alcohol more often."

Normal drinkers, controlled drinkers, do not go on that way. The controlled drinker says to himself, "I can't take that much." The alcoholic, if he says anything of the sort, doesn't mean it. After all the qualifications have been admitted, it still isn't normal to get drunk.

Warren Fulbright pointed out some of the peculiarities of periodic drinkers. In extreme cases there are periodics who go for a year without plunging off the deep end—then follows a terrible bender during which the victim may stay drunk for perhaps three months. A monthly period is more usual, and often the interval is shortened as years pass until the periodic gets to be a steady drinker. Of course the significance of getting drunk is related to the whole picture of the drinker's life.

Alcoholic Yardstick

Psychiatrists at Johns Hopkins University some time ago prepared a list of questions as a test for alcoholism. If, they said, a person answers "yes" to one of the twenty-one questions, he is warned that he may be an alcoholic. If he answers "yes" to any two, the chances are that he is an alcoholic. If he answers "yes" to any three or more, he is an alcoholic beyond any argument.

Here are the questions:

Do you lose time from work due to drinking?

Is drinking making your home life unhappy?

Do you drink because you are shy with other people?

Is drinking affecting your reputation?

Have you gotten into financial difficulties as a result of drinking?

Have you ever stolen, pawned property or "borrowed" to get money for alcoholic beverages?

Do you turn to lower companions and an inferior environment when drinking?

Does your drinking make you careless of your family's welfare?

Has your ambition decreased since drinking?

Do you crave a drink at a definite time daily?

Do you want a drink the next morning?

Does drinking cause you to have difficulty in sleeping?

Has your efficiency decreased since drinking?

Is drinking jeopardizing your job or business?

Do you drink to escape from worries or troubles?

Do you drink alone?

Have you ever had a complete loss of memory as a result of drinking?

Has your physician ever treated you for drinking?

Do you drink to build up your self-confidence?

Have you ever been to a hospital or institution on account of drinking?

These are not trick questions, but they are searching ones. The most innocent may be found to poke a finger at some sensitive spot; the most pointed go to the extremes, but still to common denominators, of alcoholic behavior. To drink alone, to crave a drink at a certain time every day—how wide is the gap between these and such others as the matter of stealing, losing one's memory, or requiring hospital treatment? How wide, indeed! All are in the alcoholic progression.

A friend of Warren Fulbright read the Johns Hopkins questions and, with the air of having discovered something completely and infinitely absurd, exclaimed, "Why, according to that, *I'm* an alcoholic!"

Please do not refuse to face facts when you see them. Remember the excuses and rationalizations of the alcoholic.

Young Man and Alcohol

The young man will drink. I can only suppose that my sons will drink, the two boys I am addressing now.

Why not? Society at large approves alcohol. Drinking is associated with our happiest experiences—marriages, anniversaries, successes, departures on voyages, and returns home. Liquor has this romantic and adventurous tradition; it is a symbol of much that is gay and gallant and satisfying.

The young man will drink just as he will smoke, more or less, for better or worse.

What I am saying here is in no sense to deter the young man—my sons—from trying alcohol, experimenting with it, learning its ways first hand. Yet they can, indeed they should and must, learn also from the experience of others. In the modern phrase, they can and should know at the beginning what the score is.

The young man lives in an age of information. He must know at the outset that alcohol is more than a chemical substance. It is an agent that blesses or curses human life, that exerts tremendous and far-reaching power. I repeat for the young man's benefit the words set down in earlier pages of this book:

Respect the stuff. Approach alcohol with an awareness of its importance and power.

Drink sensibly. If you like the taste of certain liquors, drink with an appreciation of the quality you enjoy. There is no reason to gulp or swill. The individual who derives most pleasure from the taste of liquor is something of an epicure.

If you like the effect of alcohol, measure this as you do, or as you should, the taste. Keep your drinking in balance.

Drink upon reasonable occasions.

Remember that drinking is a grown-up business. Stories and movies and comic pictures—our whole folk lore—have set up the false idea that tossing off glasses of straight and hard liquor is the he-man way to drink. W. C. Fields in some of his funniest comedies would stand at a bar, down a straight whisky, and then use the chaser as a finger bowl; or he would swallow his hard liquor and approach a water-cooler gingerly and with wry distaste.

There is no doubt that he-men upon occasion have taken their whisky straight, but this is not what made them he-men; and today the quick shot of hard liquor is kid stuff. It is imitation of an old legend. The swilling of alcohol is associated with adolescents who hope to achieve a quick masculinity and more often wind up as young toughs who aren't really tough at all; or it is a badge of alcoholism.

Don't drink more than you want at any time. It is not at all unlikely that being unable to drink what you want in the long run may be a direct but delayed result of drinking more than you want or need now. To build up a chemical tolerance for alcohol defeats your own real interests—and it is part of the mechanism of alcohol addiction.

If you have a chance in your life to handle liquor sensibly, to control it, to make it a reward and not a penalty, that chance comes at the outset. No matter what the attractions of alcohol, it is never legitimately an end in itself.

If this should sound like preaching, I think it is because anything said about alcohol is under suspicion in view of the long custom of moralizing on the subject. And it may be that anyone who speaks earnestly from his own experience cannot avoid preaching a little. There is, however, a great deal of difference between the high moral tone that gets nowhere and essentially straight talk. The alcoholic has strong personal reasons for dismissing anything he does not want to hear; the other fellow never has the right answers. Consider, then, in your attitude toward all this, whether you have an open mind or whether you are adopting the alcoholic's secret purpose of evasion.

The Dry Drunks

I have avoided any extreme or categorical statement in regard to help for the alcoholic. I have said *the chances are* that the alcoholic will go on in his sickness, and that there is *rarely* anything he alone can do about it. This is because I know one or two alcoholics who have stopped drinking apparently through their own efforts, though I do not believe they can be considered well men. They are dry but their sobriety is not a happy or in any sense a satisfactorily adjusted state.

Take the case of Ernie Roose. He was brought up on a farm. As a boy he learned the trade of carpenter and worked at it for a while, then he wanted to improve himself, so he put on a white collar and tie and tried to be a book agent. He wasn't successful, but his failure did not seem to bother him a great deal. Rather

than go back to carpentering, which he did not like, he worked in a garage and later opened a small machine shop. He did well, married, and had a couple of children.

But by this time he was drinking periodically and when he was drunk he was apt to be mean and dangerous. Except for the alcoholic side of his life, Ernie was a good citizen and an excellent family man. When you saw him sober, you wouldn't dream that a man so quiet, so industrious, with so much evident native intelligence, could get crazy drunk, time after time, and risk everything he was working and living for.

One time he and a couple of other men were drinking in a loft on a side street and somehow, during the early hours of the next morning, a member of the trio called Dink Larsen fell or jumped from a window and lay on the sidewalk for hours with a badly broken leg. Dink's leg never did mend perfectly; he was always a semi-cripple after that. It was common talk that Ernie and the others had been having a noisy time and probably quarreling among themselves, but nobody could pretend to know whether this had been the cause of Dink hurtling from the window.

Ernie was well committed to the familiar pattern of alcoholism, but he quit liquor soon after this episode. He quit and did not begin drinking again. Nevertheless, he seemed to retain a great deal of the alcoholic's attitude; he was moody, subject to anger and enmities, detached from the life of the community. He was not, as most of us saw him, either a well or an enviable man.

As Marty Tobin put it, "I give him credit. I admire him for laying off, cold turkey. But I wouldn't want to be Ernie Roose."

"He's what I call a dry drunk," said Charlie Roach.

A dry drunk. It seemed a descriptive name. An alcoholic without liquor but still sick within himself and badly adjusted or not adjusted at all in his relationships with other men and women. We know another whose history has been pretty much like Ernie's.

A year or so after Ernie stopped drinking, he suffered a serious reverse when some manufacturer of engines took its agency away from him. He soon obtained another just as good, but at the time he was bitter with resentment. He went home, took a small step-

ladder, reached a bottle of whisky from the top shelf of a kitchen cupboard where it was kept for emergencies, and poured a stiff drink. Then he sat on the stepladder and stared at the glass.

"No," he said to himself, "I'm damned if I'm going to go through all that again."

He emptied the glass into the sink, mounted the stepladder and put the bottle back in its place again.

That was willpower to admire—yet the whole instance suggests that even if willpower would work, and it almost never does, this would not be the answer. Assume that the alcoholic could, by his own efforts, stop drinking indefinitely: he would still need outside help to become a well man and a whole man.

The example of the dry drunks is worth remembering. In most cases it is not liquor an alcoholic needs to recover from—it is the illness which liquor represents and dramatizes so terribly before all the world.

Alternatives

What can the outside help be? What is the best hope for the alcoholic?

Of course there is lecturing and admonition. There is the reading of books. The family doctor talks things over—though he may have done this a score of times already without result. He says, "If you go on this way, I warn you there will be the most serious consequences. You're an intelligent man. I put it to you straight: if you continue drinking, this is what you will have to expect—this—and this—and this." It doesn't work. You tell a man to keep out of a zone where explosives are likely to go off, and he will keep out. But you tell an alcoholic to stop drinking and expect him to do it because of his intelligence, and he won't.

The clergyman comes in and tries, sincerely, to open the recourses of religion. Any experienced observer is bound to say, in all honesty, that even if the alcoholic begins as an agnostic or an atheist, religion holds boundless opportunities for help in finding himself—the trouble is that his malady has carried him beyond the ordinary approach; he can't be reached.

As Marty Tobin says, prayer that puts all the responsibility on God is of no help. God will never strike the glass or the bottle from the lips of an alcoholic who starts to take a drink.

The traditional "getting religion" by the alcoholic has, sadly, consisted of a temporary substitution of an emotional religious jag for a whisky or gin jag. His better feelings, for a little while, take the place of a drink. No matter how sincere the alcoholic thinks himself, he isn't able to do better than this. Mark Twain told the familiar story in *Huckleberry Finn* when he described Huck's father making protestations of reform to Judge Thatcher.

Look at it, gentlemen and ladies all; take a-hold of it, shake it. There's a hand that was the hand of a hog; but it ain't so no more; it's the hand of a man that's started in on a new life, and'll die before he'll go back . . .

So they shook it, one after the other, all around, and cried. The judge's wife she kissed it . . . The judge said it was the holiest time on record, or something like that. Then they tucked the old man into a beautiful room, which was the spare room, and in the night sometime he got powerful thirsty and clumb out on to the porch-roof and slid down a stanchion and traded his new coat for a jug of forty-rod, and clumb back again and had a good old time; and towards daylight he crawled out again, drunk as a fiddler, and rolled off the porch and broke his left arm in two places, and was most froze to death when somebody found him after sun-up. And when they come to look at that spare room they had to take soundings before they could navigate it.

How many times, under how many different skies, and in terms of varied solemnity and expression, has this eternal piece of play-acting been re-enacted! Mark Twain showed its comic side, but at bottom the plot is always tragic, relieved only by typical alcoholic confusion and anti-climax.

Couldn't it work, ever, this effort to win the alcoholic by a direct religious approach? One must remember that it is sickness, not sin or evil habit or perversity that has to be dealt with.

Historically, many efforts have been made to provoke in the

alcoholic a feeling of disgust toward alcoholic liquor. Sometimes the idea has been to put something into his drink that would turn him against it and, with repetition, set up a conditioned reflex against alcohol. If drinking had really been only a bad habit, such methods might have worked.

In recent years, medicine has produced the substance known as Antabuse, an anti-alcoholic drug discovered by accident. The effect of the drug seems to be to cause the body to retain one waste product of alcohol, acetaldehyde, causing it to reach a high level in the blood and to act as a poison. Antabuse is administered to a patient only after a careful physical check-up and only on advice of a physician.

After the patient takes Antabuse, he cannot drink anything alcoholic without the most violent and distressing symptoms. The Antabuse pills cut him off from alcohol under penalty that can be terrible. This prohibition lasts, however, only as long as the pills are taken; the alcoholic can stop taking the pills and then return to alcohol after a cautious interval of several days.

Most of the alcoholics I know do not care for the idea of Antabuse because they say it is a gimmick, an external device, that does not reach any underlying cause. It changes nothing for the alcoholic, either within himself or affecting his adjustment with life at large.

"It's all right if it works for you," they say, shrugging tolerantly.

"Well, doesn't it help a man stop drinking?"

"Maybe. But who needs help to stop drinking? There's no trick to that—we all used to stop drinking, plenty of times, for a month, two months, six months. We still had the old disease."

Doctors with psychiatric training feel this too. They look upon Antabuse as a medical device that may be useful up to a point, but of course it leaves the problems of personality untouched. It cannot do anything to influence the force within the alcoholic that makes him need a drink or want a drink. It can only make him sweat his ordeal out. But of course Antabuse may be employed in conjunction with other methods of treatment, usually psychotherapy, and that is the hopeful course.

Herb Mason sums up his view of Antabuse in a story of what happened one evening at his house. Bill Reck had been off the deep end and, as Herb says, was lying on a bed of pain, trying to sober up through the inexorable jangling of nerves and the awful punishment of mind and body. Herb had taken him in to help him through the hangover.

Then an Antabuse man named Harry Hagers dropped in, pretty worried. He had to go to New York and his supply of Antabuse had run low. He wasn't sure how he would make out against the tensions and pitfalls of the city unless he could take his Antabuse tablets on schedule.

Bill Reck looked up from the aforementioned bed of pain and said helpfully, "That's all right. I've got plenty in my top bureau drawer at home—you can have it."

Bill had Antabuse in his top bureau drawer, and that should have made things all right for him, but here he was sobering up after a miserable drunken spree, joyless and doomed. For a minute or two, neither he nor Harry Hagers realized why Herb Mason laughed.

"Bill," said Herb, "it would never have occurred to you to take one of those pills instead of going on this bender, would it?"

Steve Charles took Antabuse for quite a while. "It's all right," he says, "for any of these guys who are timid."

He wasn't timid, and isn't now. He wanted a drink badly, but every day his wife stood in front of him with the Antabuse pills and a glass of water. He couldn't duck it. He tried to figure out some way to miss the four or five days required to work the Antabuse out of his system but it was no go—he simply couldn't outwit his wife. So finally he said to himself, "What the hell, I'll take a drink anyhow."

He told his wife he had to go to the veterans' hospital for a check-up. That, at least, got him away from home and out of town. As soon as he alighted from the bus at the first stop, he went into the nearest package store and got himself a jug, as he puts it.

He took a drink and, seconds later, keeled over on a woman's lawn. Of course she thought he was drunk—there was the bottle

conspicuous in his pocket. She said she was going to send for the police.

"No, Lady," said Steve. "Don't send for a cop—send for a doctor. I'm sick, not drunk."

She didn't believe him, but a taxi came along and Steve got in. The taxi driver likewise thought he was drunk. But Steve got himself taken to a motel and when the proprietor came in, Steve was lying on a couch in the office.

"Get out," said the proprietor.

"At least call me a doctor," said Steve, but the motel man said, "You go out of here the same way you came in."

Meantime Steve had taken more drinks. He had also vomited, which he thought was all to the good; maybe the Antabuse situation was taking care of itself. He caught the same taxi and this time was landed at a hotel where he ordered a bottle of cold beer and kept it down. The beer went so well that he ordered another.

This was only the beginning of Steve's adventure. He kept on bucking the Antabuse and at the end landed in the veterans' hospital and, in a matter of days, was finally discharged in good shape.

"I figured I was all right then," he says, "so I hopped a plane and went to New York, where I had really been headed in the first place, and tied on a good one."

Looking back now, astutely, from the experience of years of satisfied sobriety, he says, "The trouble with Antabuse is that it doesn't change your thinking. You've got to change your thinking."

Medicine has also tried the nutritional approach to alcoholism and has met with some success in the use of food elements to arrest or prevent intense alcoholic craving. This development is in the field of the biochemist as well as of the doctor—but there is still nothing you can eat to cure you of being an alcoholic.

Dr. James J. Smith, while treating alcoholics, was led to believe that faulty functioning of the ductless glands was always present in individuals before they developed alcoholism. The glandular deficiency, he thought, might be an inherited one. Proceeding with a series of investigations, he concluded that repeated alcoholic ex-

cesses caused progressive damage to the already inadequate glandular function. He was able to achieve beneficial results by injecting adrenal-cortex extract, and later the extract of a pituitary hormone into alcoholic patients. His purpose was to supply the deficiency caused by the failure of the adrenal cortex to meet the needs of the body, or to stimulate the adrenal cortex so that it would itself make up the deficiency. The results have been a lessening of tension in the patient, an improvement in his feeling of well-being, and a diminution of his craving for alcohol.

Such treatment may be used in conjunction with Antabuse, and both may be used with psychotherapy—which means the attempt of the psychiatrist, or of a physician using psychiatric methods, to alter the patient's emotional attitude and behavior, and to give him better insight into his own difficulties. Psychiatric treatment may be thorough and long-continued, or it may be no more than suggestive and brief. The results would seem to depend upon various things, among them how sick the alcoholic is, the real nature of his basic difficulties, the skill of the psychiatrist or physician, and the opportunity for the effective use of the methods of psychiatry.

Psychiatry has its best chance, one would think, with the young; and the young may expect more of it, always assuming that their difficulties are susceptible to treatment and remedy. The young also have more time for extended psychiatric treatment if it is desirable or necessary, whereas even the middle-aged and certainly the old are likely to view their years ahead as foreshortened and brief.

The seasoned alcoholic is apt to be a pretty battered and mishandled individual, and it may be that he cannot stand the stiffer ordeals of psychiatry, or perhaps they are not the thing for him. In any event, a layman cannot safely draw conclusions from statistics that show psychiatry as having none too impressive a record in the treatment of alcoholics—not so impressive, for instance, as A. A. This may mean that psychiatry has had insufficient scope with many patients and that to some extent, as A. A. has often done, it has tried to deal with advanced and hopeless cases.

I am referring here only to courses intended to lead to the arresting of alcoholism, and the omission of institutions primarily

devoted to drying out a patient is for that reason. But it should be said that hospital treatment, especially in institutions with special facilities or experience, is far, far better than ever before, and is still improving.

When all is said and done, there are two points to consider: what is likely to be effective, and what lies within reach of the alcoholic or his family as a practical matter. The effort against alcoholism is not a rivalry but a joint one in which psychiatrists refer patients to A. A. and vice versa, A. A. works in and through hospitals, and all sorts of research and approaches are utilized in a common cause. There ought to be no comparison of results as between antagonistic forces.

One thing the alcoholic himself must contribute if he is to be helped by any sort of treatment: he must want to stop drinking. This does not mean lip service to the idea of abandoning alcohol. It means a readiness within himself to have done with the malady that afflicts him and burdens his life. No matter how one may phrase it, this readiness means the equivalent of the A. A. First Step: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

Jerry Hotchnerr is a carpenter and a good one, but he is a periodic drinker and there is no telling just when or for how long he will be off the job because of alcohol. The other day his boss was completely fed up.

"Jerry," said he, "you go to A. A. or you're through."

Jerry approached a friend he knew was in A. A. and said he had been told to attach himself to the group. He wanted advice.

"Well," said the A. A. friend, "if you don't want to stop drinking, the thing for you to do is to tell your boss to go to hell. But if you do want to stop drinking, come around tomorrow night and go to the A. A. meeting with me."

Jerry said he really did want to quit. In that decision, its earnestness and reality, lies the prospect for Jerry as an A. A., and the same thing would certainly be true whatever treatment or effort he embarked upon to abate his alcoholism.

Ounce of Prevention

For some years it was believed unlikely that any alcoholic not yet forty years old would join A. A. with sufficient wholeheartedness to achieve sobriety by this means. The young, you see, would never surrender. In spite of all experience and wisdom, they would insist that their lives still were manageable. The early A. A. was usually a man who had hit bottom, who had lost position, money, often his family, and his claim upon health. But there were some alcoholics who reached the turning point sooner than the others; their low point was short of complete ruin and social ignominy, a fact that gave rise to recognition of "high bottom" and "low bottom" drinkers.

More recently, an increasing number of younger men and women have recognized the plain facts of alcoholism in relation to their own lives, and A. A. members in the thirties and even in the twenties are not at all unusual.

How does a young man, say of twenty-one or twenty-two, decide that he can't manage alcohol, and decide with sufficient finality and resolution to want to put alcohol out of his plans and habits for good—bearing in mind particularly that this decision is not merely an easy declaration in words but a basic, inner recognition? Well, it happens sometimes when the young drinker has disgraced himself. He hasn't managed his liquor in the easy manner of his friends. He's messed up parties, maybe indulged in violence, run into narrow misses of killing people with automobiles or in some other way through his drunken carelessness. He's found the people he respects and cares about turning from him. He's been brought up sharply enough and his experiences with alcohol have been consistently grave and unhappy enough to make him take stock of himself and his future. And he has had the lessons of alcoholism in others spread before him.

The importance of this is that young men and women can and do profit by the experience of others; they can learn the hard facts of alcoholism and themselves without running through either to the

lowest bottom of all or to any bottom whatever. Presumably for each individual there is a shadow line that he will some day cross—or draw back from in time.

Hardly less important is the fact that A. A.—or some other means by which the young man or woman may be drawn into a symposium of alcoholism, a plain, direct, colloquial presentation of alcoholic experience in others—will serve as the proverbial ounce of prevention.

Herb Mason has a young friend who came to visit him some time ago. The boy—he is still in his twenties—wasn't an alcoholic, but he wasn't showing much care in relation to alcohol. He worked as a salesman, and he had the conventional idea that the way to get ahead was to drink with customers and with the people who could help you along. His wife was worried about him. Herb introduced the couple to A. A. and the young man was impressed.

When he sat in on A. A. discussion, of course, he was still an outsider. He wasn't looking at himself as seasoned alcoholics so soon begin to do under these circumstances, but he was looking at others with surprise and interest. He learned a lot. His feeling toward liquor was changed. Maybe he grew up a little in his point of view.

At any rate, this happened some time back, and since then his wife has written that she isn't worried any more. He has written too, but in a case such as this the wife may be considered the better witness. No one can say that this young man would have become an alcoholic, though he was running chances and had no serious feeling of any long-range risk. The question was an open one; but now it seems possible to say that it has been resolved in his favor.

Taking a Practical View

If an alcoholic has reached the point of deeply and realistically wanting to do something about his disease, the problem is likely to shape up more or less like this:

No method of treatment can help unless it is *accessible*. Psychiatrists often aren't near enough. There aren't enough of them. And general practitioners cannot be relied upon as adequate sub-

stitutes; they are pretty apt to treat alcoholics by traditional methods, sedatives for sobering up, and good advice for the future. This regimen is convenient for the doctor but hopeless for the patient, who needs psychotherapy or its equivalent.

A few weeks ago Herb Mason went to the local hospital to talk to an alcoholic patient, Ben Pennock, who was sobering up after a series of benders. In the corridor Herb met Dr. Marlock, who was handling Ben's case. It wasn't necessary for Herb to talk to Ben, Dr. Marlock said.

"He's an intelligent man," the doctor explained. "I'll have a talk with him."

He did. Ben was drunk again within two weeks. We all like and admire Dr. Marlock, but he doesn't yet know what we know—that *only an alcoholic can understand an alcoholic*. It wasn't the same thing for Dr. Marlock to talk to Ben as it would have been for Herb Mason, who had himself been drunk, miserable, and desperate many a time, who had faced the horrors and tried every remedy, to talk to him.

You don't find adequate psychotherapy in most towns. You do find A. A., for nowadays it is almost universal and where it doesn't exist, a group may easily be started. One group I've been told about started with just two alcoholics, one of whom was fond of canasta.

"We had just ten minutes of A. A. and an hour and a half of canasta once a week," the other charter member said to me. "That first winter was tough but the going has been a lot better ever since."

The group now has some thirty regular members.

Another requirement for any treatment for the alcoholic is that it must be *reasonable in cost*. We all know of wealthy alcoholics, but the common or garden variety is apt to be broke or on the raw edge, especially if, as in so many instances, he has been a low bottom drinker. Specialists cost money. Sanitariums cost money. A. A. is free.

And the treatment must allow for *time*, for *failure* as well as success. The one-shot cure doesn't exist. It is dangerous for the alcoholic to embark with high hopes upon some step that, if it fails

to fulfill expectations, will lead to a renewed plunge into despondency. A. A., of course, expects nothing more of the alcoholic than he can, with a will to have others help him, manage to perform. A. A. is well acquainted with slips and stumbling as well as with success. Perhaps in some instances temporary failures are part of the program of recovery.

Maybe there is a paradox here: you take your chance—but you don't take any chance at all, for you can't lose. A. A. works at once for some, more gradually for others, and for still others it hasn't worked yet. From the standpoint of the alcoholic, A. A., which guarantees nothing unreservedly, is apt to be the surest thing there is. As a practical matter, it puts time on the side of the patient.

One of the most important of all requirements is that there should be the best *knowledge* of today concerning alcoholism. Researchers, specialists, institutes, and many hospitals have advanced knowledge of case histories, techniques, and the latest discoveries in medicine and psychiatry. Sometimes they are within reach of the individual patient and sometimes not. Probably he will have to settle for a local doctor or A. A. The A. A., for this reason, provides itself with up-to-date information as well as the lessons of a vast fund of experience.

All this, no doubt, sounds like special pleading for A. A., or an argument that A. A. is the logical first choice for the alcoholic who wants to escape his illness and bondage. I haven't intended it as that, but merely as a means of raising questions the alcoholic and his family will want to answer.

How sick is the alcoholic?

Where does he live?

What is his income? Does he have to stay on the job?

What help can he expect from his family?

We're considering practical terms here. There is no doubt that A. A. is apt to be the readiest hope, for it is an opportunity always open, it is free, accessible, timeless. It passes no judgments, closes no doors, participates in no final disappointments. But all this is not to say that if a sick man is within reach of good psychiatric treatment, he should not try it. Let him, perhaps, ask his psychi-

atrist if A. A. will do or if he should plan for something else. In any case, let the alcoholic be content only with the real thing—good psychotherapy or an earnest participation in A. A.

The chances are that the new man will approach A. A. with mixed emotions. His entrance into the meeting place for the first time will be awkward, embarrassed, or anxious. He won't feel comfortable. Probably he will be cherishing a good deal of cynicism; he will expect things to turn up that, for him, will be false notes. He will have made up his mind to dislike something, even if he can't as yet say what that something will be.

But waiting in a specialist's office or in the reception room of a sanitarium is an occasion for mixed emotions also. The alcoholic is a cynical guy, about A. A., about psychiatry, about psalm-singing religion. An old-fashioned sinner on revival night rushes for salvation, but the alcoholic walks into any program or treatment with many a suspicious glance to right or left and many a peering over his shoulder. Even though he has made his admission of helplessness, he still retains the distorted view of a sick personality.

The inner core of his personality is something the alcoholic, his family, his friends commonly know nothing of, though an understanding wife may sense it intuitively and, if she learns something of alcoholism and the psychiatric point of view, may interpret correctly. Recognized or not, the core is there, waiting to be broken down, and usually the alcoholic's objections and arguments spring from it.

On the Outside Looking In

There is a great deal that ought to be done about alcoholism by our contemporary age, by society, by the big shot in the office and the little guy across the street. Nothing happens apart from the background in which we live or detached from the standards and sanctions we have inherited, developed, or set for ourselves and others. In terms of humanity we are all one, and in terms of a modern society we are all one; much of our unity rests upon a gigantic compromise and is subject to dissents, pleadings, appeals and so on, but it is a sort of unity just the same. We dis-

agree and fight among ourselves as we march, but we march together.

I have mentioned the pro-liquor orator of my boyhood who proclaimed that if a man were bent on filling a drunkard's grave, he should be allowed to fill it. I have told, too, of my memories of the prohibition era in which society, swinging to the other extreme, attempted to police the lives of all individuals—within the jurisdiction of this nation, at least—to make sure they did not fill drunkards' graves or, indeed, take a first step in that direction.

We know now that both attitudes were completely wrong, the result of little vision and less knowledge. The orator was expressing an extreme individualism which in some respects is alluring. The prohibition majority in the nation was expressing an ideal of protection for the weak and erring, a demonstration of society safeguarding its own, which has an admirable side.

But the true function of society and its government does not follow either hope. *The true function is to provide an informed and candid climate in which men and women will be encouraged to drink normally and decently, if they choose to drink at all—as they almost certainly will—and in which the alcoholic, the individual who cannot drink normally, will be treated with understanding and respect and provided with the means toward the adjustment he requires.*

Society, the generality that includes us all, must have:

Understanding.

Maturity.

Frankness.

Health.

The order may seem a large one, but what necessary element do we lack, given earnestness and a clear vision of the goal?

Legendary and Reality

On the vaudeville stage, in literature, in the movies, in the folk lore of humor, the drunk has been a comic fellow. We may allow him to continue to occupy this place of laughter; we should all be poorer without his diversions. But our frame of reference should

be such that we do not confuse what is literary and mythical with what is real.

A drunk may be funny. A drunken father or husband or brother is never funny.

Not so many years ago, the meat industry attempted through a publicity campaign to eliminate the term "hot dog" because it was inaccurate and because it disparaged the honest ingredients of which the product known as hot dogs are made. The effort quickly failed as it deserved to do; and hot dogs continued in popularity. The American public was, and is, and will be discerning enough to relish an idiomatic term and at the same time to know that it bears no relation whatever to fact. So with the humor of drunkenness. Let it remain as a literary matter, but let it be removed further and further from our common experience.

At a party, a drink all round loosens tongues and enhances the feeling of friendship and wit. This is a normal, wholesome influence of alcohol. It would be a grievous loss if we were not to continue to enjoy the wit and aphorisms of a friend whose stern mould is softened and whose inhibitions are slackened by the grace of high-ball or cocktail.

But the fellow who takes too much, who stumbles, who cannot talk straight, who perhaps quarrels, or who slumbers in his chair or on the hall floor, should not be the hero of any occasion. We do not need society or government to police us, but we should police ourselves. The matter is one of taste. The prohibition era saw a lamentable lapse of taste on a national scale insofar as drinking was involved; bad taste became a matter of sophistication. People aspired toward it. Wars are apt to add the new element of "I don't give a damn" and "what the hell!" It is satisfying to see stuffy decorum routed in this way—but the principle is a dangerous one all the same.

Those who glorify the drunk at a party or in a public place, and help him to make a fool of himself, must share in some measure the responsibility for the national malady of alcoholism. What can anyone do about alcoholism? Be grown up. Exercise good taste. Exhibit common sense.

The social climate is a product of the behavior of all men and women. Here the need for intelligent standards comes home.

If you know a man can't drink or shouldn't drink, don't encourage him to do so. Don't say to him. "But a little beer won't do you any harm, will it?" Or, "How about just a drop or two with a lot of water?"

On the other hand, don't treat him as a freak and act as if he would probably grab a cocktail out of your hand or from a tray if you didn't rush past him quickly or stealthily. Have something besides alcoholic liquor—tomato juice, ginger ale, iced tea, anything at all—and let him choose it for himself. He will. You don't have to force it into his hand. Or, perhaps, he won't want anything. Don't act horrified if this is the case; there's no social calamity if a man or woman chooses not to drink anything at all during some particular interlude.

The customs and rites of drinking have become well established but they have not altogether eliminated or condemned the preference for not drinking. Not drinking may be graceful, polite, relaxed. You'll be doing something about alcoholism if you realize this and give your blessing to the experience. In time you may even come to envy it a little; for if drinking is normal and enjoyable for those who can take it, endless drinking is not. Even for those who are at home with alcohol, there are occasions to drink and occasions to take respite from drinking.

One of the unfortunate social influences is the cult of hard liquor.

"What will you have?" asks the host or hostess.

"Bourbon on the rocks," says the sweet young thing.

"Any water?"

"N-n-n—well, maybe a drop!"

The stiffer you can take it, the more modern you are, the more experienced and worldly. Or are you? It is a fashion to look down upon the effeminate cocktails of yesterday—the Pink Lady and the Golden Dawn and the Clover Club and so on; some may have been sickish messes, but some were pretty sensible combinations of a moderate amount of alcohol with fruit juices to provide an appealing taste and not too sudden a jolt for the drinker. The cult

of hard liquor is not in accordance with the facts; there is nothing wrong with mixed drinks, and combinations of alcoholic liquors and fruit juices are civilized and expedient as well as palatable.

There is nothing wrong with hard and straight liquor, either, except in unreasonable quantity and for those who cannot take it. But the present-day cult insists not only on the liquor being hard and straight but upon its being supplied in the form of a good, stiff jolt.

The whisky must be on the rocks. Water must be added with spare scrupulousness. The Martinis must be dry—forty parts gin to one of vermouth is a classic concept and not always an exaggerated one. What is all this, anyway? Does society desire to court alcoholism as children used to court wet feet by running benders on thin ice over some back yard pond?

The real sophistication lies in moderation, artistry, the realization of a grace in drinking; and the most important thing of all is to set before the younger generations a true and not a false standard.

Police, Courts, and Law

In no respect does society and its government err more grievously than with the handling of alcoholic cases that involve police action. It must be said at once that there are many honorable exceptions—police officers and judges who have more understanding and wisdom than the archaic laws under which they act—but the system itself, though better in some states than in others, is without any sound medical or social or human concept.

The old idea still prevails that arrest and punishment will act as a deterrent to an alcoholic. Nothing could be more remote from demonstrated fact. I have referred to a woman called Nora who drank for many years and has now been sober for years through A. A.—her commitments to institutions of one sort or another numbered something like fifteen hundred. Alcoholism knows no deterrent.

The courts with which most of us are familiar do nothing but connive at the pattern of alcoholism; they process alcoholics

through stage after stage of progressive illness, treating them as recalcitrants, as lawbreakers, as moral weaklings. They admit no inkling of fact, because the laws were drawn not in accordance with fact but according to myth. They foresee the darkest end for drunks who are multiple offenders, and they take no effective action to prevent that end from being realized.

Most institutions to which alcoholics are committed, so far as we know them, succeed only in "drying out" the patient. But of course there are enlightened hospitals of various sorts and degrees in which modern knowledge and understanding are brought to bear. There should be more institutions—to which alcoholics will be sent in any case, under existing laws—where proper attention is practicable, where alcoholism is understood as an illness.

The problem is too difficult for the layman; it is one to be dealt with by psychiatry, medicine, and jurisprudence. But who can doubt the seriousness or the great dimensions of the problem, or the urgency of undertaking a solution? Where alcoholism should have its greatest opportunity for aid—at the place where it meets head-on the active agencies of society and government, it still has, in general, a woeful lack of plan or of constructive action.

On an increasing scale, A. A. has cooperated with the courts. We hear of this, and the news is cheering. What if our local judge should parole alcoholics on condition that they attend meetings of A. A.? The suggestion has been made by various outsiders.

The advanced alcoholics, or some of them, seem beyond reach. Others might not be helped, for A. A. stops no one from drinking who does not want to stop. Yet A. A. does open a fund of deep experience and it does establish an atmosphere in which the desire to quit drinking may be encouraged and crystallized. There are, no doubt, alcoholics whose inner wish to quit is suppressed or disguised, just as there are so many whose hidden determination not to quit is concealed behind apparent consent.

The Value of Recognition

Wider knowledge on the part of the public may well serve an important purpose in respect to unrecognized alcoholism. In our

society we have many individuals holding off any private admission that they are alcoholics, and holding off even longer and more adroitly any admission to another person; and if the people around these individuals are unprepared to recognize the disease, ignorance is worse compounded.

This does not mean that friends and relatives should stand ready to point an accusing finger or to offer unsought advice as to someone's drinking habits. It does mean that they should be informed and understanding where alcoholism is concerned, and that they should consult expert advice early rather than late. There is always A. A. for frank help and discussion, though the alcoholic himself must be the one to seek A. A. for the working of its program.

The mere awareness of what alcoholism is and how it affects thinking and behavior, its danger signs, its typical results, is bound to serve a useful purpose. To know how to help and not to hurt, to be sympathetic rather than superior or indignant, to serve usefully in the mustering of the right sort of public opinion in respect to alcoholism and its treatment—all this is much to the good.

10. A Final Word to My Sons

THE classic admonition of a father to a son is that spoken by Polonius in *Hamlet*:

This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

It will seem not only a stunning anticlimax but a descent into vulgarity if a modern father substitutes a less literary and sheerly expedient behest: "Watch your tensions." The watchword of the day, the hour, the minute seems to be—"tensions." Is this a sad or rueful commentary upon the age in which we live, and upon the level of our culture? Perhaps it is; but perhaps the words are harsher than their meaning.

We have not changed so much in ideals or aspiration, but our blood pressure seems to race with the spinning dynamos and pulsing internal combustion motors. We have vast quantities of power outside ourselves but no more power within than men possessed in Shakespeare's day. Our own inventions tax our still limited, still only human resources. We set up patterns that stretch and quicken and test our lives.

But most of all it is significant that we make individuals fit as parts into a great design, or a number of great designs that more or less cluster into an overall colossus of modern working and living. As human beings we are departmentalized and specialized, set off in grooves; and this means that all of us are involuntarily and

unintentionally exclusive. We are aware of boundless opportunities but within them are definite limits, staked out and marked. We do not live, so many of us, whole lives in the old sense. We live part lives. Never in all human history has it been easier for men and women to be misfits.

Some tensions result from sustained and intense work, or continuing responsibility, or anxiety; some are induced because our lives exclude too many of the things we need and include too many, proportionately, of the things that run counter to our inner hunger. There are honest tensions which deserve honest relief, and there are false tensions that represent maladjustments.

It is easy to see that alcohol may serve a welcome and useful purpose in respect to the first; but to attempt to relieve by means of alcohol those tensions due to basic inadequacies or misfit lives is ruinous. The relief, if that it can be called, must be administered continuously. The only remedy is to change the circumstances and requirements that make these individual lives too limited or distorted or miscast.

A modern Polonius must say, not only "Watch your tensions," but "Don't be a misfit."

There can be no substitute for a satisfactory adjustment. This does not mean that irritations or discontents or fatigue or even anxiety can be eliminated from life; but basically there can and must be a sort of fruitfulness, a balance and respect between man, his job, his friends, his life. He must have elbow-room, some feeling of worth and achievement, a time to rest, a time to work, a time to escape.

The arts and entertainments offer honest avenues of escape: books, pictures, music, plays, sports. From them man turns back again to the reality of life; but from alcoholic escape he does not always turn back in time.

In saying these things, I know I have not said more than Shakespeare put into the mouth of Polonius: "To thine own self be true." It all adds up to the same thing. But you must have an honest, whole self to which to attach your high fidelity.

Who are you? You must find out, and then you must be your-

self. You must not live a buried, immersed, confused existence, suffering inner strains, playing at subterfuge, hiding out from the pursuit of the real. You must meet life on life's own terms. Yet with courage and candor you must insist upon your own right to difference and individual expression.

Thoreau wrote some verses in which he prayed first that he might satisfy himself, and then added:

And next in value, which thy kindness lends,
That I may greatly disappoint my friends.

What the world or the family or the guy next door may expect is not the true measure of what an individual must be and do; he really does not want to disappoint them, but he does not want to be stuffed into any mould that is not his own, and from which, for the duration of years he cannot foresee, he may crave escape and release through such an artificial or destructive means as alcohol.

Alcohol Is Not a Philosophy

There is more alcoholism in our age and in our society than we recognize. I have not consulted any statistics but from my observation and experience I believe it is on the increase. This must mean that men and women expect from alcohol much more than they should, much more even than escape and release. Some, I know, look to it for a certain standard of life, a cultivation, a somewhat more than material excellence translated into their own satisfaction.

Because alcohol seems to induce such pleasant moods and up-rushing thoughts and reflections, some of our fellow inhabitants of the globe are half persuaded that it is in itself a kind of philosophy. One may understand the illusion—but alcohol remains a chemical substance. At the end as at the beginning, that is what it will be. Only mankind can supply the philosophy.

I have said more than once that it is good to drink, but it is also good not to drink. No man faces a choice of satisfaction on the one hand, or denial on the other; he faces a choice of two satisfactions.

I will speak of myself. Do I still want to drink? No—and this is an honest answer. I think I have not so much cured myself of the craving for alcohol as I have discovered the goodness of sobriety, a goodness quite as complete and fruitful as that known to the temperate drinker through alcohol.

There is the same richness within me as a human being; there is the same range of experience, the same philosophy and faith. Indeed, there is a wider range of experience, since I no longer seek adventures at home with a bottle but find them out and afield, under the sky, in books, in the hearts of friends. More is required of me, but as I have lost the habit and, at last, even the memory of alcoholic response and alcoholic thinking, I have more capacity to undertake, to feel, to believe, to carry through.

It was singular that through so many alcoholic years, others had faith in me, but I had no faith in anything. What should have been my faith was kept in hiding.

The Higher Power

I believe none of us is complete without faith; and the faith that seems to touch the deepest truth and win our only real emancipation within ourselves carries with it awareness of a higher power. Who am I to attempt to define that conception? Each human being makes his own research.

To this research I commend my sons in this age of tension, competition, and anxiety. Here is the seeking that goes beyond the temporary and unimportant and, through the effort itself, provides a sense of proportion, one of the living needs for man.

I have written of alcoholism, and I end with a word of faith; the two are closely related. But I do not preach now any more than at the beginning. What I offer is my own experience and conviction and my earnest desire is that they may speak for themselves in language plain enough to be understood.

About the Author

IN HIS previous books Henry Beetle Hough has written mostly of such engaging, light subjects as the charm of country landscapes and the pleasures of country living. In this book he turns his attention, with ease and success, to a more serious and dramatic subject. Since 1920 Mr. Hough and his wife have lived on the island of Martha's Vineyard, where they have been co-editors of the Vineyard Gazette, a local weekly which has a national reputation for quality. Mr. Hough is the author of eight books before this one, including *Country Editor* and *Singing in the Morning*, and articles and stories which have appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, *Esquire*, and other magazines.

